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EQUIPPING THE MEMBERS OF GRACE FELLOWSHIP
CHURCH IN HAZLETON, PENNSYLVANIA, IN THE
PRACTICE OF BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHP

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CHURCH IN HAZLETON, PENNSYLVANIA, IN THE
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For the glory of God.

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PREFACE

Thank you triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for putting in my heart love for your Word and for guiding me in your providence toward seminary education. Thank you to all of my professors at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for being the means that God used to help me grow in the knowledge of Scripture. Thank you to my faculty supervisor, Dr. Jeffrey Hunter, for all your guidance, support, and prayers during the development of this doctoral ministry project. I appreciate all your help in this process. Thank you to my lovely wife, Hardys, for your support in this process and for encouraging me in every step during this journey. Thank you, our daughter and sons, Elizabeth, David, Jeshua, and Elijah, for being my inspiration and a source of joy in my life, I love you all. Thank you to Grace Fellowship Church for the prayers and support; so many loving brethren that encouraged and prayed for me, especially the elders. I pray that God uses this project to bless and help the church grow spiritually and numerically in His grace and for His glory.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

God's purpose for those He has chosen for his glory is to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). Discipleship entails equipping each other in the process of growing in Christlikeness. The apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthians to imitate him the same way he imitated Christ (1 Cor 11:1). Encouraging each other to imitate Jesus should be a constant practice among members of every local church. A disciple follows Christ's way of life, including the way he practices spiritual disciplines, his obedience to the Father's commandments, and his sharing of the gospel with the lost. This project intends to create a curriculum in discipleship by emphasizing Christlikeness in the daily walking with the Lord through the practice of spiritual disciplines, imitating Christ in his obedience to the Word, close fellowship among believers, and encouraging each other to make more disciples.

Context

This ministry project took place in the context of Grace Fellowship Church (GFC), a reformed Baptist church located in Hazleton, Pennsylvania. GFC has many strengths. First, its leaders are committed to the faithful expository preaching of the Word of God and the teaching of sound biblical doctrine with good exegesis, along with appropriate contemporary applications of Scripture. The majority of the churches in the community are from Catholic and charismatic denominations, and among the churches in Hazleton, GFC has a strong reputation for its adherence to sound doctrine. GFC is also known in the community for helping the needy through a monthly food distribution ministry, in which the Word of God is proclaimed to the people. In this way GFC cares

for and empathizes with the physical and spiritual needs of the community. The elders of GFC believe that the Holy Spirit uses the faithful preaching of Scripture to transform those saved by grace toward Christlikeness, according to God's will and purpose. In addition, Scripture is preached and taught on Sundays during three services, two Bible school sessions, and a weekly radio program.

A second strength of the church is a direct result of the first strength above mentioned. Due to the faithful expository preaching, most GFC members are knowledgeable in the biblical soteriological doctrine that salvation is by grace alone, through Christ alone, by faith alone, for the glory of God alone (Eph 2:8-9). There are many genuine followers of Christ at GFC, Christians who love the Lord and want to glorify God in their lives. Many have been in the church for decades; others are younger in their walk with the Lord. New believers are taught during a four-week class, covering mostly the doctrines of grace, the five points of Calvinism, the privileges and responsibilities of a member, and the constitution, purpose, and mission of the church.

GFC also has areas with opportunity for growth and improvement. First, some members of GFC do not fully embrace what is taught in a practical way, even in the setting of sound and faithful biblical teaching. There is some degree of passivity in some members who come to church each Sunday to be fed with the preaching of the Word but do not practice active discipleship among one another.

Second, some GFC members have opportunity for growth in encouraging one another toward the pursuit of Spirit-dependent obedience to the commandments of Christ. An important component of the Great Commission is "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20).¹ Genuine Christians pursue intentional obedience in order to please and glorify God.

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

Third, some GFC members can improve in the practice of spiritual disciplines, including prayer, fasting, Bible intake, and learning and memorization of Scripture, among others. For example, only a minority of the members regularly attend corporate prayer services. Prayer was constantly practiced by the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (Matt 14:23; 26:36; Mark 6:46; Luke 5:16). Spiritual disciplines are godly habits that are vital for Christians, and the practice of them by believers serves as a means to grow in Holy Spirit-dependent holiness and sanctification.

Fourth, one-on-one mentoring and disciple-making among some GFC members can be strengthened. A true and genuine disciple of Christ makes more disciples by helping other believers grow in Christlikeness and obedience. Increased fellowship among believers is vital to develop relationships that will facilitate this practice of discipling one another. The apostle Paul instructed Timothy to entrust faithful men to teach other believers (2 Tim 2:2), and this cycle needs to continue as a constant practice in a healthy church.

Lastly, there is opportunity for growth in the area of personal evangelism. Some members of the church can grow in the practice of sharing the gospel with the lost by talking to unbelievers about Jesus in every feasible opportunity. Personal evangelism is another important aspect of being a genuine disciple of Christ. GFC has a ministry for food distribution that is done once a month, which is accompanied by evangelistic efforts by the church, supplying food to the community, and at the same time presenting the gospel to unbelievers. The church also sponsors a weekly radio program in which the Word is preached to the community every Sunday. Despite these efforts, many members can grow more individually in the practice of spreading the gospel and evangelizing their neighbors, co-workers, friends, and family.

In summary, while GFC has several strengths, including faithful expository preaching and biblical sound doctrine, resulting in members with solid foundational knowledge of the doctrines of grace, the church can grow by teaching and equipping

members to be more actively involved in the practice of discipleship. This growth will foment a culture of disciples that pursue Christlikeness and teach other believers the same.

Rationale

The awareness and the culture of discipleship can be strengthened among the members of GFC. Those truly saved by grace glorify God by the joyful and diligent pursuit of being conformed to the image of Christ, imitating his way of life, his spiritual practices, his obedience, and doing everything possible to replicate this in other believers. The elders of GFC are committed to the task of discipleship, but the church, as a whole, can be more involved as well. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus instructed his followers to make disciples and to teach his commandments to one another. The preaching of the soteriological truth of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, by Christ alone, for the glory of God alone, is a GFC stronghold that must continue and should never be neglected. The point that salvation belongs to the Lord (Ps 3:8) is clearly understood by all members of the church. At the same time, the members can grow in the practice of other biblical truths.

First, GFC members can grow in the practice of accountability conversations between one another, in which sins are confessed to one another, with collective pursuit of Spirit-dependent obedience and constant prayers for the fruit of the Spirit. Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide” (John 15:16). In John 15:2, Jesus Christ stated, “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” In John 15:10, Jesus said, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in His love.” Salvific faith, given by God to those he has chosen, is accompanied by fruit and obedience. A disciple of Christ longs to please and glorify God with gratitude and joy.

Second, GFC members know they are created to glorify God, but awareness that God is glorified when believers reflect and imitate Christ can grow among some members. God's will for all Christ's followers is that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, they become a replica of Jesus Christ, including the way Christ practiced spiritual disciplines, while being in absolute dependence on the Spirit and the Word. Matthew 5:16 states, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." The great commandments, mentioned by the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, are to love God with all our hearts, souls and minds, along with loving others as oneself (Matt 22:37-39). The Spirit of God enables a genuine disciple to grow in loving obedience, sacrificially practicing and teaching it to one another in godly relationships and fellowship among the believers. Christians cannot do this by their own means, they must pray, long, and desire obedience to God. The Holy Spirit produces fruit in the elects as believers are united with Christ: "For apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Third, I perceive that many GFC members have little to do with intentionally making disciples, thinking that it is only a responsibility of the leaders (elders and deacons) rather than a commission given by Christ to all. In the Great Commission, Jesus Christ told His followers: "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded" (Matt 28:20a). All members of the church (not only the leaders) are commanded by Christ to practice discipleship.

GFC members will benefit from a discipleship curriculum that focuses on what it means to live in the grace given to them. Recipients of the salvific grace of God grow in the practice of spiritual disciplines, grow in the knowledge of Christ's commands, grow in imitating Christ's obedience to the Father, pray ceaselessly for the fruit of the Spirit, and desire close fellowship with other believers who also have been recipients of God's salvific grace.

In summary, by increasing the awareness in the church of what discipleship entails, the members of GFC will grow in pursuing Christlikeness and will intentionally replicate this practice among one another. This emphasis in imitating Christ will create a discipleship culture that will be an integral and crucial element at GFC. My desire in this project is to encourage a discipleship practice among the members, focusing on the pursuit of imitating Jesus, imitating the way he practiced spiritual disciplines, imitating his obedience, and making other disciples that do the same.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of Grace Fellowship Church in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, in the practice of biblical discipleship.

Goals

To accomplish the above indicated purpose, this project focused on the following goals:

1. The first goal was to assess the current understanding and practice of biblical discipleship by the members of GFC.
2. The second goal was to develop a seven-session curriculum that teaches and equips the members of GFC in biblical discipleship.
3. The third goal was to increase the understanding and practice of biblical discipleship among the members of GFC through the curriculum.

A specific research methodology was created that measured the successful completion of these three goals.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of the three goals. The first goal was to assess the current understanding and practice of biblical discipleship by the members of GFC. This goal was measured by administering a Discipleship Understanding and Practice Survey (DUPS) to at least fifteen adult members

of the church before the teaching curriculum starts.² The survey measured the participants' knowledge of discipleship in the context of salvation, daily spiritual disciplines, pursuit of Christ-like obedience, fellowship among believers, and disciple-making efforts. To ensure credibility and participation, the surveys were anonymous; each participant had an identification number so that pre-training and post-training surveys could be compared. This goal was considered successfully met when at least fifteen adult members completed the DUPS and the surveys were analyzed and yielded a clearer picture of the discipleship knowledge and practices among GFC members.

The second goal was to develop a seven-session curriculum that teaches and equips the members of GFC in biblical discipleship. The analyzed data in the first goal helped in determining the emphasis of the teaching program. The curriculum focused on being disciples that imitate Christ's practices of spiritual disciplines, disciples that imitate Christ's obedience and knowledge of His teachings, disciples that replicate discipleship by teaching and equipping others to do the same, and finally, disciples that care for the lost and constantly look for opportunities to share the gospel. This goal was measured by the elders of GFC who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.³ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, then the material was revised until it met the standard.

The third goal was to increase the understanding and practice of biblical discipleship among the members. This goal was measured by administering DUPS after the teaching curriculum was completed to measure post-training progress in the

² See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

³ See appendix 5.

understanding and practice of discipleship. This goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms was used in the ministry project:

Disciple. A *disciple* is a follower and imitator of Christ; a pupil who learns and practices the Lord's commandments and teaches others to do the same. A genuine disciple "puts the relationship with Jesus Christ above every other relationship, follows Christ no matter what the cost, and gives everything (spiritual gifts and skills) for the kingdom of God."⁴

Discipleship. *Discipleship* is "the process of learning the teachings of Jesus and following after his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit."⁵ In addition, *discipleship* involves the process of making other disciples through teaching and evangelism. The aim of discipleship is Christlikeness (Luke 6:40), which is the final goal of eternal election as understood by the apostle Paul (Rom 8:29).⁶

Christlikeness. *Christlikeness* is both and at the same time a goal and a process for every follower of Jesus Christ. Christlikeness is a Holy-Spirit dependent process by which believers are conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ, especially in relation to obedience. At the same time Christlikeness is also the final goal for all Christians. God refashions believers in the image of his Son through the Holy Spirit, "who is set before

⁴ Gary C. Newton, *Growing toward Spiritual Maturity*, Biblical Essentials Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 24.

⁵ Chris Byrley, "Discipleship," in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), Logos.

⁶ Michael J. Wilkins, "Disciple, Discipleship," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 177.

them as a model of the form of the redeemed life.”⁷

Disciple-maker. A *disciple-maker* is a disciple of Christ who helps others become disciples. Jesus commanded His followers to be disciple-makers (Matt 28:19-20), so making disciples is a responsibility of all believers.

Spiritual disciplines. *Spiritual disciplines* are those disciplines, both personal and corporate, that promote spiritual growth. They are the “God-given means we are to use in the Spirit-filled pursuit of Godliness.”⁸

Fellowship. *Fellowship* is defined as interaction between believers with the purpose of nurturing each other for Godliness. Fellowship is “the sharing in activities or privileges of an intimate association or group; especially used of Christians and churches.”⁹

One limitation applied to this project. The accuracy of the pre- and post-training surveys were dependent upon the willingness of respondents to be honest about their knowledge and understanding of theological ideas of discipleship and disciple-making. To mitigate this limitation, respondents were able to remain anonymous in their answers.

One delimitation was placed on the project. The project was confined to a fifteen-week timeframe. This timeline gave adequate time to prepare and teach the seven lessons in the curriculum and to conduct the DUPS after sessions are completed.

Conclusion

Biblical discipleship is vital for the spiritual health of the local church. It

⁷ Martin H. Manser, ed., *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009), s.v. “Christlikeness,” Logos.

⁸ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 17.

⁹ David Witthoff, ed., *The Lexham Cultural Ontology Glossary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), s.v. “fellowship,” Logos.

provides believers with the tools needed for daily walking with God in Christlikeness. God's children are empowered by the Holy Spirit to be imitators of Christ and disciple-makers. A curriculum in biblical discipleship would equip GFC members in the practices that transform believers in the likeness of Jesus and multiply themselves in making more disciples. Chapter 2 of this project will outline the biblical and theological basis for discipleship. Chapter 3 will outline the historical and theoretical basis for discipleship. In Chapter 4 the ministry project will be implemented. Finally, Chapter 5 will evaluate the results of the ministry project in regards to its purpose and its goals.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS
FOR DISCIPLESHIP

Scripture clearly indicates that those chosen by God grow into Christlikeness through active involvement in discipleship, including active pursuit of obedience to the commandments of Christ, active practice of spiritual disciplines, active fellowship between believers, and intentionally making other disciples. An exposition of John 15:8-12 and Mark 12:29-31 demonstrates obedience by Christ that needs to be imitated by his disciples. An exposition of Matthew 6:5-18 and Luke 2:46-47 demonstrates the spiritual disciplines in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ that need to be imitated by his disciples. An exposition of Acts 2:42 demonstrates the biblical example of fellowship in the early church as a model for today's church in the practice of discipleship. And finally, an exposition of Matthew 28:19-20 shows God's commandment to make more disciples, empowering each other for ministry and the likeness of Christ.

Christlikeness in Spirit-Dependent Obedience

Christ obeyed perfectly (Phil 2:8; 2 Cor 5:21), a task that is impossible to achieve by any other because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Nevertheless, those elected, called, and saved by God, those who are disciples of Christ, are commanded to grow in imitating Christ's obedience, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20). Disciples grow in obedience, not perfectly but progressively, as the Holy Spirit works, transforming their lives toward the image of the Son. Moreover, those that are in Christ are known by their fruit (Matt 7:16). Christ said in John 8:29, "For I always do the things that are pleasing to him [the Father]" and of this Gary Burge points out, "Jesus' remarkable sense of the Father's presence, even as he

describes the cross that awaits him, is linked to his perfect obedience to God's will: 'I always do what pleases him.'¹ Christ's obedience to the Father's commandments was also an indication of the love between them: "But I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father" (John 14:31). Burge continues, "Jesus' obedience to God's plan within these events should be seen as an example of his love for the Father (a love, hopefully, every disciple will imitate, 14:21)."² Christ expects his disciples to grow in Spirit-dependent obedience to God's commandments, not in a legalistic way to earn salvation as it is not by works (Eph 2:8-9), but as a demonstration of their love for him, showing the fruit evidencing that indeed they are in Christ. Those that truly abide in Christ bear fruit: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (John 15:4). Regarding this verse, Gerald Borchert indicates,

Just as the Father abides/dwells in Jesus (14:10) and the Paraclete would abide in them (14:17), so they are commanded as his disciples to abide in the Vine. . . . A branch is not a self-contained entity, and neither is the Christian disciple. And as a branch separated from the supply of nourishment cannot produce fruit, neither can the Christian. Fruit bearing for the disciple is totally dependent on a direct connection to Jesus. Attachment to Jesus or abiding in him is, therefore, the sine quo non of Christian discipleship.³

Exposition of John 15:8-12

John 15:8-12 is part of the final teachings and instructions Christ gave to His intimate disciples in what has been known by theologians as the "Farewell Discourse,"⁴ right after they celebrated the Last Supper in Jerusalem and the night before Jesus's crucifixion. Later that night, Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, and the Lord was arrested,

¹ Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 259.

² Burge, *John*, 401.

³ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, The New American Commentary, vol. 25B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 142.

⁴ Burge, *John*, 374.

beaten, and tortured. The next day, he was crucified at a place called Golgotha, or Calvary, a sacrifice made by God the Son to save sinners.

God created humans to be image bearers (Gen 1:27) for his glory (Isa 43:7), and these two realities are manifested in those that are genuine disciples: “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (John 15:8). The Greek word καρπὸν (*karpon*) translated as “fruit” (literally or figuratively) is associated with “actions of men,”⁵ and in the context of John 15, the disciple’s bearing of fruit is contingent upon fellowship and union with Christ (15:2). Disciples glorify God by practicing Holy-Spirit dependent obedience, reflecting His image by fruit, while being conformed in the likeness of Jesus, and in that way demonstrating that they are in Christ. George Beasley-Murray points out that “in such fruitbearing the Father is glorified in the believer, as he is in the Son in his redemptive work (John 12:23, 28, 31-32; 13:31-32; 17:1), and so doing the believer becomes a true follower of his Lord—a disciple.”⁶ Borchert clarifies, “This text must not be understood as implying that the disciples glorify the Father directly as the result of their own actions. It is because they abide in Jesus, the Vine, and are obedient to Him in the bearing of fruit that they bring glory to the Father.”⁷ Glorifying God by bearing fruit is the purpose of discipleship—doing so “not only indicates that the followers are true disciples (*mathētai*) of Jesus but also that God is glorified in their discipleship.”⁸ A relevant question believers have to ask, as pointed out by Arthur Walkington Pink, is whether their “lives honor and magnify the Father, or

⁵ Friedrich Hauck, “Καρπός, ἄκαρπος, Καρποφορέω,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-), 614.

⁶ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Dallas: Word, 1999), 273.

⁷ Borchert, *John 12-21*, 146.

⁸ Borchert, *John 12-21*, 146.

whether they are a reproach to Him. An unfruitful branch is a dishonor to God.”⁹ Pink cites James Inglis, stating that “the fruit is *Christlike* affections, dispositions, graces, as well as the works in which they are displayed.”¹⁰ Wesley Gerig indicates that fruit can also be understood as “the manifest evidence one may expect from a life in which the Spirit of God is living and reigning.”¹¹ A disciple that manifests in his/her life the fruit of love, joy, peace, patient, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23), honors and glorifies God through his/her obedience and proves to be a truly and genuine follower of Christ. R. C. H. Lenski rightly indicates, “The glory of His blessed attributes shines forth before the eyes of men and of angels.”¹² In verse 9, Christ expressed this for his disciples: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you” and then he encouraged them “abide in my love.” Only by abiding in Christ’s love are disciples able to bear fruit, as it does not come from one’s own strength, but from God’s power. John Calvin comments, “When in this passage Christ exhorts us to persevere [abide], we must not rely on our own efforts and battles, but must pray to Him who commands us in order to confirm us in His love.”¹³ Jesus then connects abiding in his love with having his joy: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11). The joy of a genuine disciples does not come from anything of this world; it is a fruit of the Spirit that depends on the believer’s fellowship with Christ in abiding in Him. Colin Kruse comments, “While obedience is

⁹ Arthur Walkington Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth Depot, 1923), 826.

¹⁰ Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 827.

¹¹ Wesley L. Gerig, “Fruit of the Spirit,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 818.

¹² R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 1042.

¹³ John Calvin, *John*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), Jn 15:9, Logos.

demanding, it is the pathway of true joy. . . . Jesus' joy came from doing the Father's will, and the joy of disciples will come from doing what Jesus commands them."¹⁴ This joy also does not signify that believers would not have struggles and tribulations in this world; rather, as stated by John Calvin, that "the ground for 'joy' will be far greater, so that no fear, no anxiety, no grief will ever swallow them up. Neither life nor death nor any miseries will stop people from triumphing over sadness if they have been allowed to glory in Christ."¹⁵

In the next verse Jesus specified how abiding in Christ's love is also directly related to obeying his commandments: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (John 15:10). Leon Morris points out, "It is simple obedience. It is when we keep Christ's commandments that we abide in his love. Once again appeal is made to Christ's own example. He kept the Father's commandments and thus abides continually in the Father's love."¹⁶ Abiding in Christ also needs to be manifested in the way his disciples relate to one another. Those who are in Christ practice love for one another: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12), and "these things I command you, so that you will love one another" (John 15:17). Morris cites Augustine's, saying, "Love, and do what thou wilt," commenting that this "is a clear expression of what Jesus is teaching here. If we love, in the sense in which Jesus uses the term, we need no other rule."¹⁷ J. Ramsey Michaels notes that when the disciples practice love for one another, they "make their dwelling in Jesus' love (v. 9), acting out their new

¹⁴ Colin G. Kruse, *John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 4 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 316.

¹⁵ Calvin, *John*, Jn 15:11.

¹⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 597.

¹⁷ Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 598.

identity in their relationship to one another.”¹⁸ For this reason Jesus said, “For apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5b). The elect are only able to practice spiritual disciplines, practice obedience, grow into Christlikeness, and love God and one another because of being in Christ and abiding in Christ—all the glory is for God.

Exposition of Mark 12:29-31

Disciples pursue the likeness of Jesus in spirit-dependent obedience to his commandments, for God’s glory, and through abiding in Christ’s love. Jesus taught his followers the most important commandments of all, upon which “depend all the law and the prophets” (Matt 22:40). This teaching was the providential result in the context of scribes asking Jesus what he considered to be more relevant in the law. Ben Witherington III comments, “There was in early Judaism a great deal of dispute about how to rank the 613 commandments (248 positive commands, 365 prohibitions) in the Hebrew Scriptures in terms of importance, and even more debate as to which one was the most crucial or paramount of these commandments, which then could be used as a hermeneutical tool to interpret the rest.”¹⁹ The scribes questioned Jesus about it and he answered, “The Most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31). Christ quotes here Deuteronomy 6:4-5, known by the Israelites as the *Shema* (which is the Hebrew word “to hear”), that was “recited morning and evening by every pious Jews.”²⁰ The first portion

¹⁸ J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 811.

¹⁹ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 330.

²⁰ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 371.

of the text indicates how the disciples, in loving God, should think of him as being one, having a triune awareness of the Godhead, because, as pointed out by James A. Brooks, “the obligation to love God is based on his oneness. Because he is one, love for him must be undivided.”²¹ Then Jesus continues, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (v. 30). The word “all” before each element indicates that God should be loved intentionally and with complete devotion. Deuteronomy 6:5 mentions only three words, “heart,” “soul,” and “might,” and Jesus in verse 30 also adds “mind.” Henry Barclay Swete indicates that the three Hebrew words לֵבָב (*lebab*) “heart,” נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*) “soul,” and מְאֹד (*meod*) “might or strength,” all together “represent the sum of the powers which belong to the composite life of man . . . the ‘heart’ being in the psychology of the ancient Hebrews the organ of intellect, and the ‘soul’ of the desires and affections.”²² In requesting love with all of these elements, according to James R. Edwards, “God lays rightful claim to every facet of human personality,”²³ including emotions, spirit, intelligence, and will. Loving God like this cannot be done in a legalistic manner, as those who love God this way are only able to do so because of a divine work in their life. They must first be recipients of a new heart (Ezek 36:26-27) and receive a new birth in Christ (John 3:3) through the power of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). William Lane points out, “To love God in the way defined by the great commandment is to seek God for his own sake, to have pleasure in him and to strive impulsively after him. Jesus demands a

²¹ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, The New American Commentary, vol. 23 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 197.

²² Henry Barclay Swete, ed., *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (London: MacMillan, 1898), 284-85.

²³ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 371.

decision and readiness for God, and for God alone, in an unconditional manner. Clearly this cannot be the subject of legal enactment. It is a matter of the will and action.”²⁴

Jesus then tells the disciples the second great commandment, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31), quoting Leviticus 19:18, something that is crucial in practicing discipleship, because, as indicated by William L. Lane, “a whole-hearted love for God necessarily finds its expression in a selfless concern for another man which decides and acts in a manner consistent with itself.”²⁵ The Jews in the Old Testament understood neighbor as meaning only fellow Jews, even though Leviticus 19:33-34 extends the command to strangers in their land that were non-Israelites. However, Brooks writes, “One of the most significant elements in the teaching of Jesus was to redefine the neighbor as everybody, including the hated Samaritans and Gentiles,”²⁶ demonstrated in Luke 10:25-29 in the parable of the Good Samaritan. In this sense, loving others as self includes not only fellow believers in discipleship, but also the lost in the world, loving them in action and in the preaching of the gospel. R. Alan Cole points out,

The heart of true religion is seen to lie, not in negative commands, but in a positive loving attitude to God and others. This is the Pauline “liberty” of the New Testament (Gal. 5:1). This is what St Augustine means by saying “Love and do as you like,” for such love towards God and others will in itself keep us from licence. If we love others, we will do nothing to work them hurt and, if we love God, what we like and choose will be to do God’s will and pleasure (Ps. 40:8). That is why Paul can say “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10).²⁷

Christlikeness in Practicing Spiritual Disciplines

The gospels reflect Christ’s intense dedication in practicing spiritual disciplines, which are, according to Donald S. Whitney, “God-given means we are to use in the

²⁴ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 432-33.

²⁵ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 433.

²⁶ Brooks, *Mark*, 198.

²⁷ R. Alan Cole, *Mark*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 272-73.

Spirit-filled pursuit of Godliness.”²⁸ Disciples grow in being like Christ by consistently practicing what he practiced, in complete dependency upon the Holy Spirit. It is evident in Scripture that Christ had a robust prayer life, practiced the discipline of fasting in solitude with his heavenly Father and studied the Word of God earnestly.

Christlikeness in Prayer

Disciples grow in the likeness of Jesus by the consistent pursuit of imitating his prayer life, with the power of the Holy Spirit. Christ prayed constantly. He looked for every opportunity to go alone with his heavenly Father in prayer. This is appreciated in many verses in the Gospels. After feeding five thousand “he went up of the mountain by himself to pray and when evening came he was there alone” (Matt 14:23). After healing a man with withered hand, Jesus “went to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12). After healing Simon’s mother-in-law, and many other people with diseases and oppressed from demons, Christ, “rising very early in the morning while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35). These are just few examples showing how important it was for Christ to practice the spiritual discipline of prayer. Jesus’s disciples witnessed His devotion to a faithful prayer life, so they asked him to teach them to pray: “Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

Exposition of Matthew 6:5-15. In Matthew 6:5-15 Christ gave clear instructions to his disciples regarding prayer. It is contained within the context of the “Sermon of the Mount” (Matt 5:1-7:29), which is described by Augustine, and cited by

²⁸ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 17.

Hughes, as “a perfect standard of the Christian life.”²⁹ The Sermon of the Mount contains, as noted by R. T. France, a compilation of Christ’s teachings “bearing in different ways on the theme of discipleship . . . with the character, duties, attitudes and dangers of the Christian disciple.”³⁰ The sermon also defines the disciples’ nature of life as part of a communion of people that belong to God and his kingdom, in which central to it is the person of Christ. France continues, “For his sake the disciples are to be persecuted (5:11); he sets before them his own interpretation of the will of God (5:17-48: ‘I say to you . . .’); their eternal destiny depends on their relation to him (7:21-23) and their response to his teaching (7:24-27).”³¹ R. Kent Hughes points out that this sermon is a compacted, congealed theology of Christ that shows where one stands in relation to the kingdom and eternal life, whether one is truly a believer/disciple, and an “antidote to the pretense and sham that plagues Christianity.”³² Part of this sermon is Jesus’s teachings regarding prayer.

When the Lord says, “and when you pray” (Matt 6:5a), he clearly, as indicated by Spiros Zodhiates, “implied that prayer is the norm in the believer’s life,”³³ and that he expects his followers to pray. The Greek word προσεύχομαι (*proseuchesthai*), translated in English as “to pray,” “to pray to,” “to ask,” “prayer,” and “petitionary prayer,” is an act of calling and talking to God, and also has the connotation that it needs to be practiced as a regular habit.³⁴ The apostle Paul clearly understood this expectation, which is why he

²⁹ R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 15.

³⁰ R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 111.

³¹ France, *Matthew*, 111-12.

³² Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 16.

³³ Spiros Zodhiates, *Exegetical Commentary on Matthew* (Chattanooga: AMG, 2006), 53.

³⁴ Heinrich Greeven, “Εὔχομαι, Εὐχή, Προσεύχομαι, Προσευχή,” in Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 807.

encouraged the Thessalonians to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17). Prayer must be done sincerely: “You must not be like the hypocrites” (6:5b). Leon Morris notices how hypocrites pray “with their eye on people when they should be concerned with God only,”³⁵ and to pray like them is to play-act to be seen by others in order to receive praise. The motives of the heart are crucial—prayers are for God, not for gaining favor with men—and that is what Jesus is getting at when he told his disciples not to pray like them³⁶: “For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward” (6:5b). A clear example of this type of prayer is taught by Jesus in Luke 18:9-14 with the parable of the Pharisee (who was praying hypocritically to praise himself) and the tax collector (who was praying sincerely and focused on God). Pink indicates, “Saying prayers and pouring out the heart before God are totally different things: a self-righteous Pharisee may be diligent in the former, only one who has been born again will do the latter.”³⁷

Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray in secret: “And your father who sees in secret will reward you” (v. 6). France points out, “This passage is not intended to prohibit audible prayer in public as such. While Jesus is often portrayed as praying privately (Mark 1:35; 6:46; etc.), he also on occasion prayed aloud where others could hear (11:25; 14:19; 26:39, 42; Luke 11:1). . . . The issue here is not the prayer but the motive.”³⁸ Public prayer is not condemned by Jesus, but the desire to be seen in public while praying is what was reproached. Hughes indicates, “The early church thrived on public prayer, as

³⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 140.

³⁶ Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 158.

³⁷ Arthur Walkington Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2005), 152.

³⁸ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 239.

the opening chapters of Acts so beautifully attest (1:24; 3:1; 4:24). Jesus was emphasizing that prayer is essentially a conversation between the believer and God. It is intrinsically private, not exhibitionist. Man is to shut out every distraction and focus on God.”³⁹ With right godly motives, public orations are very appropriate, but, as Craig Blomberg notices, “should represent the overflow of a vibrant personal prayer life . . . prayer ought not to be used to gain plaudits, summarize a sermon, or communicate information to an audience but should reflect genuine conversation with God.”⁴⁰ Disciples of Christ ought to watch the motives for their prayers both privately and publicly. Those who pray with the right motive will be rewarded with the spiritual benefits of growing into holiness and Christlikeness.⁴¹

Jesus also warned his disciples to “not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words” (v. 7). The Greek word βατταλογήσητε (*battalogēsēte*) in this verse implies “babble,” “much speak,” or “meaningless repetition,” all of which indicate the repetition of the same words over and over without thinking.⁴² Donald Hagner points out that βατταλογεῖν is an onomatopoeic word “probably derived from the cognate noun meaning ‘stammerer’ or ‘stutterer,’” but “the verb here, however, refers not to a speech impediment but to the repetition of meaningless syllables.”⁴³ Thomas Tehan and David Abernathy indicate that it was a common practice for gentiles to utter magical phrases to manipulate the deity, repeat long lists of gods’ names hoping to hit the true God name and receive a positive answer to their

³⁹ Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 149.

⁴⁰ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 117.

⁴¹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 117.

⁴² Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 274.

⁴³ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), 147.

prayer, and perform prayers “characterized by formalized invocations and magical incantations in which performing the words exactly right was the most important thing.” They also believed that “one’s chances of being heard improve the longer and louder the prayer is.”⁴⁴ Christ told his disciples, “Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him” (v. 8). Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes,

He sees it all. He knows your heart; other people do not. You can deceive them, and you can persuade them that you are quite selfless; but God knows your heart. . . . I sometimes feel that there is no better way of living, and trying to live, the holy and sanctified life than just to be constantly reminding ourselves of that. When we wake up in the morning we should immediately remind ourselves and recollect that we are in the presence of God. It is not a bad thing to say to ourselves before we go any further: “Throughout the whole of this day, everything I do, and say, and attempt, and think, and imagine, is going to be done under the eye of God. He is going to be with me; He sees everything; He knows everything. There is nothing I can do or attempt but God is fully aware of it all. ‘Thou God seest me.’” It would revolutionize our lives if we always did that.⁴⁵

God is omniscient. He receives no new information with prayers. He knows it all, at the same time, as pointed out by Wilkins, “though God already knows, we should not hesitate to ask. Jesus’ disciples don’t pray to give him information but to express their desires, their needs, and their dependence on their heavenly Father.”⁴⁶ Jesus intention in verse 8 is not to discourage prayers in his disciples, but rather, as Blomberg notices, he “calls for simplicity, directness, and sincerity in talking to God,”⁴⁷ with an honest, God-focused and humble attitude, being aware that “God knows our needs, but he has also chosen to grant some things only when his people pray (Jas 4:2).”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Thomas Tehan and David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of the Sermon on the Mount*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL International, 2008), 109.

⁴⁵ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 2:15.

⁴⁶ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 274.

⁴⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 118.

⁴⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 118.

In this context Jesus teaches his disciples what is known as the Lord's Prayer.

He tells them to pray like this:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.⁴⁹

Michael Wilkins rightly indicates, "While it is commonly referred to as 'The Lord's Prayer,' it is actually 'the disciple's prayer,' because it is an example for them to follow."⁵⁰ It is also important to point out that this prayer is a model or a pattern to guide the disciples in their prayers. It is not intended to be a constant verbatim repetition of these words. As it has already been indicated, Jesus condemned empty phrases and repetitions in prayers (Matt 6:6); instead, he warns, "do not be like them" (v. 8), in reference to the hypocrites who "love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners" (v. 5). France notes that the first three clauses of the disciple's prayer are concerned with God's honor, kingdom, and purpose, and the last clauses are dependent/submitted to God's sovereign priorities rather than one's own wishes and desires.⁵¹

The model of prayer taught by Christ to his disciples has several parts that need to be considered. It starts with the phrase "our Father in heaven." Here, the term "Father" is "Abba," which is, as pointed by Wilkins, "a name used by children for their earthly fathers that denotes warmth and intimacy in the security of a loving father's care."⁵² Therefore, when Jesus teaches his disciples to come to God calling him father, he wants them to know they can come with the trust that exists within an intimate father-son relationship. The next part, "hallowed be thy name," reflects the desire of the one who prays that God be honored, and in this sense. Wilkins continues,

⁴⁹ Matthew 6:9-13 (ESV).

⁵⁰ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 274.

⁵¹ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 243.

⁵² Wilkins, *Matthew*, 275.

To hallow God’s name means to hold it in reverence—hence, to hold *him* in reverence, to honor, glorify, and exalt *him*. This is the essence of the first three of the Ten Commandments: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything. . . . You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God” (Ex. 20:3-7; Deut. 5:7-11).⁵³

When one goes to God in prayer, there needs to be a self-consciousness of the fact that one is about to communicate with the most powerful and holy being in the universe; hence, that awareness encourage believers to go into prayer with a sincere and humble attitude, opening their hearts fully to Him, recognizing their own sinful nature in front of a Holy and perfect God. In other words, Jesus is teaching His disciples to always honor God’s name, especially in their prayers. Matthew 6:10 contains the third part of the disciple’s prayer. Here Jesus instructs them to pray for God’s kingdom to come and for His will to be done in whatever is being asked in the prayer. France points out how “the essence of the coming of God’s kingship is that he is duly obeyed and His purpose fulfilled” and in this regard “the ‘already—not yet’ tension is here more explicit, as the situations in heaven (where God’s kingship has been eternally honored) and on earth (where it is yet to be fully acknowledged) are compared. The time must come when God’s human creatures join his angelic forces in honoring and serving their king.”⁵⁴ Jesus is teaching His disciples the deep desire of those who follow him to see the kingdom of God fully manifested on earth; a time in which all will completely submit to the lordship of God and obey Him with love and joy. In this part of the disciple’s prayer, Jesus makes clear how doing the will of God summarizes what it means to be his disciple.⁵⁵

The next part/petition is “give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 6:11). Here Jesus teaches His disciples the principle of daily dependence on God for all their physical and spiritual needs. In specifying “today,” it also implies that His disciples should not be anxious for the needs of tomorrow because they can trust in their heavenly Father who

⁵³ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 276.

⁵⁴ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 247.

⁵⁵ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 247.

sovereignly provides their daily needs, trusting in God one day at a time. The next part/petition of the prayer is concerned with asking God’s forgiveness for sins committed and disciples’ pardoning others the sin against them (Matt 6:12). France points out that this text clearly teaches that “disciples are to forgive those who have wronged them . . . doing so serves as evidence that a person has truly been forgiven his or her debt of sin. If we don’t forgive, it is an evidence that we haven’t experienced forgiveness ourselves.”⁵⁶ The final clause of the disciple’s prayer is about asking God for protection—asking God for help and deliverance from committing future sins. In other words, asking God for preservation of falling into temptations during daily spiritual battles in one’s sinful nature (Matt 6:13). In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus instructed his disciples to pray in this same way: “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:41). Regarding this last part of the disciple’s prayer, Craig Bloomberg indicates,

“Lead us not into temptation” does not imply “don’t bring us to the place of temptation” or “don’t allow us to be tempted.” God’s Spirit has already done both of these with Jesus (Matt 4:1). Nor does the clause imply “don’t tempt us” because God has promised never to do that anyway (James 1:13). Rather, in light of the probable Aramaic underlying Jesus’ prayer, these words seem best taken as “don’t let us succumb to temptation” (cf. Mark 14:38) or “don’t abandon us to temptation.”⁵⁷

Christ was a man of prayer. He expected His disciples to pray and He taught His disciples how to pray and how disciples ought to imitate their master. Consequently, discipleship requires cultivating the spiritual discipline of prayer. Christ practiced prayer intensely, so His disciples ought to follow His steps and do the same, and also teach one another the model of prayer instructed by Jesus.

Finally, it is important to point out that prayer can be individual or corporate, and audible or silent. Postures for praying include standing (Gen 18:22), seated (2 Sam 7:18-29), lying in bed (Ps 63:5-6), or prostrating oneself or lying flat on the ground (Mark

⁵⁶ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 279.

⁵⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 120.

14:35). People kneel (Acts 9:40) and bow (Gen 24:52) and are encouraged to do both (Ps 95:6-7). Finally, some people in Scripture often prayed with their hands uplifted (Ps 28:2; 63:4; 134:2; 141:2; 1 Tim 2:8).⁵⁸

Christlikeness in Scripture Intake

Disciples grow in the likeness of Jesus by the constant pursuit of imitating His Scripture intake, in dependency of the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ devoted himself to the study of Scripture. This can be appreciated in how Christ interacted with those who opposed Him, showing, with Scripture, the truth of His teachings. When tempted in the wilderness, Christ won over Satan’s temptations because of His knowledge of Scripture, interpreting it in its correct context (Matt 4). Satan quoted to Jesus Psalms 99:11-12: “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, He will command his angels concerning you, and, on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Wilkins points out, “The original Old Testament context does not imply that God will send protecting care for every harmful situation. Jesus sees through the devil’s Scripture-twisting to the sinister motivation behind it, by replying from Deuteronomy: ‘It is also written: “Do not put the Lord your God to the test”’ (4:7; cf. Deut. 6:13).”⁵⁹ The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17) and was used by Christ to fight against evil. Scripture is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16-17) and was used by Christ in discipling his followers. Because of Jesus’s study and knowledge of Scripture he was able to successfully discern the devil’s twisting, rightly interpreting it by taking into account the whole context of the text. Jesus’s knowledge of the Bible also prevented those with evil motives to trick him with

⁵⁸ Arland J. Hultgren, “Prayer,” in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, ed. Mark Allan Powell, rev. and updated ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 824.

⁵⁹ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 159.

mischaracterized texts. Christ's disciples can imitate his devotion in scriptural intake, as manifested by him since he was a child.

Exposition of Luke 2:46-47. The Gospel of Luke shows how Christ, since a young age, was devoted to Scripture. This devotion can be clearly appreciated through the narration of the twelve year old Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:41-52). Jesus was brought to Jerusalem by Joseph and Mary for the Feast of the Passover in the Jewish month of Nisan (late March and early April), a feast that celebrated Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Exod 12). When the feast ended, "the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:43) without his parents knowing about it. After a day journey of returning, which is about twenty to twenty-five miles,⁶⁰ Joseph and Mary realized Jesus was not with them when they searched for him "among their relatives and acquaintances" (v. 44), so they went back to Jerusalem to find Jesus. "After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (v. 46). I. Howard Marshall indicates that "usually teaching by the rabbis may have taken place within the temple precincts or a neighboring synagogue. . . . The hearers sat on the ground, at the feet of the teachers who were themselves seated, on the analogy of synagogue practice."⁶¹ Joel Green points out that Jesus was raised "in a pious environment, but his commitment to God's purpose transcends that piety and that environment."⁶² Here, John Nolland says, "Jesus is depicted as an eager student, learning in the dialogical pattern of the day."⁶³ Leon Morris explains the fact that Jesus stayed for days in the temple after

⁶⁰ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 121.

⁶¹ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 127.

⁶² Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 155.

⁶³ John Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35A (Dallas: Word, 1989), 130.

the Passover feast, listening to the teachers and asking them questions, indicating a thirst in Jesus for knowledge as “there would have been few good teachers in Nazareth, and Jesus was making the most of the opportunity of learning while he was in the capital city. The educational system of the day seems to have put emphasis on the discussion of problems. This method gave scope for a bright pupil both to ask and answer questions.”⁶⁴ All the teachers in the temple and all who heard Him “were amazed at his understanding and his answers” (v. 47). Darrell L. Bock points out, “Even at this young age Jesus has amazing knowledge of the things of God. . . . Already early in life Jesus values the pursuit of comprehending God, as He increases in ‘wisdom and stature’ (Luke 2:52). His approach to knowing God and seeking understanding pictures how we should pursue the same, even at a young age.”⁶⁵

For Jesus to be able to refute His opponents with truth, He first needed to know Scripture well. He had a hunger for God’s Word and was disciplined in Scripture intake. Consequently, He acquired exemplary knowledge of it, which is clearly evidenced by the way He rebuked Satan, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes. The way Christ studied, meditated, lived, and applied Scripture is an example that needs to be imitated by His disciples. Christ expects His followers to “search the Scriptures . . . it is they that bear witness about me” (John 5:39).

Christlikeness in Fasting

Fasting was another spiritual discipline practiced by Christ. Disciples grow in the likeness of Jesus by the constant pursuit of imitating the way He practiced it, in dependency of the Holy Spirit. After His baptism, He fasted for forty days and forty nights (Matt 4:2) before formally beginning His earthly ministry. Even though this

⁶⁴ Leon Morris, *Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 108.

⁶⁵ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 100.

particular prolonged fasting by Christ “is not presented as a model for His followers to practice . . . [it is] an experience unique to the Son of God at the outset of his mission.”⁶⁶ Nevertheless, when Jesus told His disciples, “and when you fast” (Matt 6:16), He implicitly expressed His expectation for them to practice this spiritual discipline. Unfortunately, fasting is neglected in many churches. There is little preaching about it and little practice of it, neither personally nor corporately. In the *Institutes of Christian Religion* John Calvin writes, “Let us, therefore, say something about fasting, since very many, while they do not understand how useful it is, regard it as not very necessary; others also, considering it superfluous, completely reject it. And, since its use is not well understood, it can easily lapse into superstition.”⁶⁷ Calvin indicate that appropriate holy and biblical fasting has three main objectives:

We use it either to weaken and subdue the flesh that it may not act wantonly, or that we may be better prepared for prayers and holy meditations, or that it may be a testimony of our self-abasement before God when we wish to confess our guilt before him. . . . Whenever men are to pray to God concerning any great matter, it would be expedient to appoint fasting along with prayer.⁶⁸

Donald S. Whitney also supports the fact that fasting is done for a purpose, including strengthening prayer (Ezra 8:23), seeking God’s guidance (Judg 20:26-28; Acts 14:23), expressing grief (1 Sam 31:13; 2 Sam 1:11-12), seeking deliverance or protection (2 Chr 20:3-4; Esth 4:16), expressing repentance and returning to God (1 Sam 7:6; Joel 2:12), humbling oneself before God (1 Kgs 21:27-29), expressing concern for the work of God (Dan 9:3), ministering to the needs of others (Isa 58:6-7), overcoming temptation and dedication to God (Matt 4:1-11), and expressing love and worship to God (Luke 2:37).⁶⁹

⁶⁶ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 130.

⁶⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 1:1241.

⁶⁸ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1:1242.

⁶⁹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 164-78

Exposition of Matthew 6:16-18. In addition to practicing the spiritual discipline of fasting, Jesus also expected His disciples to observe it in the right manner. This expectation is clearly understood when He tells them, “and when you fast” (v. 16). Fasting was not new for the disciples, as it was normally practiced by the Israelites in which persons, as explained by Barclay M. Newman and Philip C. Stine, “deliberately go without food, usually as a way of honoring God or as part of a period of meditation and prayer.”⁷⁰ Newman and Stine also indicate,

For the Jewish community of Jesus’ day, the three primary expressions of piety were charity, prayer, and fasting. . . . The only official Jewish day of fasting was the Day of Atonement, when eating, drinking, bathing, and anointing with oil were forbidden. The Jews would also fast in connection with the celebration of days of national disaster, and it was frequently done on a private and individual basis as well.⁷¹

Christ advised His disciples to guard their hearts and motives when fasting: “Do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others” (v. 16b). Rather, Matthew Poole points out, “it should be in sincerity . . . for the glory of God, not for ostentation and appearance unto men.”⁷² The hypocrites that Jesus was referring to practiced fasting for the appearance of piety, and not with godly motives and sincere heart, in which, as indicated by Matthew Henry, there was no “contrition or humiliation of soul in them, which is the life and soul of the duty. Theirs were mock-fasts, the show and shadow without the substance.”⁷³ Instead, Christ encouraged His disciples that when fasting they should anoint their head and wash their face, that their fasting may not be seen by others but their heavenly Father in secret (v. 17). Blomberg notices that “as with almsgiving and prayer, those who fast must not advertise their piety

⁷⁰ Barclay M. Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 174.

⁷¹ Newman and Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, 174.

⁷² Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible* (New York: Robert Carter, 1853), 3:28.

⁷³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1639.

by visible signs of suffering and deprivation . . . instead people must groom themselves according to cultural norms in order to appear joyful and content.”⁷⁴ Although Jesus encouraged fasting in secret, it is not a prohibition of corporate fasting, when done with godly motives, as the apostles and the early church did practice fasting comparatively (Acts 13:2; 14:23). The frequency of fasting is not stated by Christ, and as Whitney points out, “It’s interesting that Jesus gives us no command regarding how often or how long we should fast. Just like all the other spiritual disciplines, fasting is not to be a legalistic routine. It is a privilege and an opportunity to seek God’s grace that is open to us as often as we desire.”⁷⁵

Christlikeness in Fellowship among Believers

Christ loved His disciples. Christ served His disciples. In the same way, Christ expressed His desire that His followers help and minister to one another in loving fellowship. Jesus washed the feet of His disciples as an example of how His disciples have to serve one another: “If then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you” (John 13:14-15). Here, Jesus is teaching His disciples that they should serve one another in loving fellowship. As Burge indicates, “Jesus’ sacrifice will be the supreme token of His overwhelming love for the world. . . . Jesus now wants His followers to exemplify that same love to one another. His act of sacrifice cannot be repeated, but His model of self-giving love can become a natural feature of the community that follows Him and imitates Him (13:14-15).”⁷⁶ Jesus washing His disciples’ feet, as explained by Kruse, “contained a symbolic message about the need

⁷⁴ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 121.

⁷⁵ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 164.

⁷⁶ Burge, *John*, 371.

to receive the cleansing made possible by His self-humiliation on the cross,”⁷⁷ but also was a lesson for them that “the ‘greatest’ of Jesus’ disciples needs to be ready to render humble service to the ‘least’ of the disciples when necessary.”⁷⁸ In Jesus’s high priestly prayer in John 17, He prayed for the unity of His disciples “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. . . . I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (John 17:21, 23). Kruse notes that the unity between the Father and the Son

is extended to the disciples. . . . This relationship between believers and the Father and Jesus would be brought about through the ministry of the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, sent to the disciples after Jesus’ return to the Father (John 15:26; 16:7). Because the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within them, the Father and the Son dwell within them also, and they dwell in the Father and the Son (John 14:15-20).⁷⁹

Unity is needed for the kind of servant and loving fellowship Christ desires between His disciples. True disciples—those that are united with Christ—are also united to one another, and this unity and love is manifested in the way disciples practice fellowship, by nurturing one another, for the purpose of Godliness, for the purpose of Christlikeness.

Exposition of Acts 2:42

Luke, in Acts 2:42, provides a picture of the essential elements needed in Christian discipleship as practiced by the mother congregation in Jerusalem, and that also should apply to the church of today. After the Holy Spirit’s manifestation in Pentecost, which marked the official birth of the Christian church, Peter spoke his first gospel sermon, after which three thousand souls were added that day. The church was growing and they started to live life together as fellow disciples of Christ: “They devoted themselves to the

⁷⁷ Kruse, *John*, 278.

⁷⁸ Kruse, *John*, 280.

⁷⁹ Kruse, *John*, 340.

apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The Greek work translated as "fellowship" in this verse is *κοινωνία* (*koinōnia*), the basic meaning being "association, communion, close relationship."⁸⁰ When the text says that they devoted themselves, it implies "a steadfast and single-minded devotion to a certain course of action."⁸¹ In close relationship, in fellowship, the primitive church devoted together to the essential elements of Christian discipleship: to the apostle's teachings, the breaking of the bread, and prayer. The first essential element is adherence to the apostle's teachings. According to John B. Polhill,

Just as the apostles had been instructed by Jesus, so they passed along that instruction to the new Christians. In keeping with Jesus' teaching to them, this would have included such subjects as His resurrection, the Old Testament Scriptures, the Christian witness, and surely their own reminiscences of Jesus' earthly ministry and teachings.⁸²

This also included the Christian responsibilities and Spirit-dependent bearing of fruit that Christ expects from His followers. In other words, the disciples in the early church adhered in fellowship to the teachings of Jesus and taught the same to one another in their practice of discipleship. The second essential element is the breaking of the bread, which as rightly pointed out by Ajith Fernando, "refers to the Lord's Supper . . . probably part of the ordinary fellowship meals as described in 1 Corinthians 11."⁸³ The Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ himself the night he was arrested, for the perpetual remembrance of His expiatory sacrifice (1 Cor 11:23-26), in celebration of God's presence and in communion with God and other believers in the church. The bread and wine served as a sign and representation of the body and blood of Christ in his covenantal sacrifice (Luke

⁸⁰ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 119.

⁸¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996), 47.

⁸² Polhill, *Acts*, 119.

⁸³ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 121.

22:19). Christ is spiritually present in the church's celebration of the Lord's Supper. Consequently, believers enjoy many spiritual blessings through this sacrament, including confirmation of their faith in Christ's expiatory sacrifice for their salvation, and communion with Him and one another. The third essential element needed in Christian discipleship in their life together, and another expression of their fellowship expressed in this verse is "the prayers," which is, according to Chalmer Ernest, "most likely a reference to appointed times of united prayer among the believers. . . . There may also be a secondary reference to believers' attendance at regular prayer times in the temple."⁸⁴

The elements of fellowship mentioned in Acts 2:42 ought to also be essential in the present-day church, speaking to each other God's truth, in love, with the purpose of growing into being Christ (Eph 4:15).

Christlikeness in Reaching the Lost

Christ came to save the lost (Luke 19:10). He came to call sinners, "those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (Mark 2:17). This reality is clearly visualized in the Gospels. Christ came to proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives, recover sight of the blinds, and set at liberty those who are oppressed (Luke 4:18-19). Christ also expected His disciples to continue proclaiming the good news so that those who are spiritually blind can see the truth, as the Holy Spirit convicts them through the preaching of the gospel.

Exposition of Matthew 28:19-20

Just before his ascension Jesus instructed his followers to make disciples in the Great Commission: "Go therefore and make disciples to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"

⁸⁴ Chalmer Ernest Faw, *Acts*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1993), 48.

(Matt 28:19-29). Hagner points out, “The commission itself is given by means of one main imperative verb, μαθητεύσατε, ‘make disciples.’”⁸⁵ Consequently, all that are in Christ have the command to preach the gospel, reaching the lost with His message. The Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the gospel to convict His chosen people of sins, to bring them into repentance, into becoming disciples of Christ, and then the process continues to replicate in each new disciple. Jesus tells them to go to “all nations,” as salvation is not only to the Israelites but it includes the Gentiles. Donald A. Hagner explains, “Jesus’ ministry in Israel was the beginning point of a universal offer of salvation to all the peoples of the earth.”⁸⁶ Jesus then instructs His followers that disciples must be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, an act that associates the new believer with the triune God, because, as indicated by France, “the experience of God in these three Persons is the essential basis of discipleship.”⁸⁷ All believers who have received the gift of salvation by grace are baptized after repentance and confession of faith in Christ (Acts 2:38, 41), and this outward sign serves as a sign of fellowship with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:3-5; Col 2:12; Gal 3:27). Baptism is also a sign of the cleansing and remission of sin that has already happened spiritually in those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ alone (Ezek 36:25; Mark 1:4; Acts 2:38; 22:16). Regarding baptism, R. C. Sproul comments,

Baptism communicates that we have been united to Jesus Christ. It shows that we have been cleansed from sin, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and buried and raised again with Jesus Christ, just to mention few of its significations. God promises that all who have faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, will participate in all of the promise, all of the benefits, that Christ has secured. Baptism is not a sign of one’s faith; it is a sign of the faithfulness of God to give all of His Son to all who believe.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 33B (Dallas: Word, 1995), 886.

⁸⁶ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 953.

⁸⁷ France, *Matthew*, 420.

⁸⁸ R. C. Sproul, *Matthew*, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 826.

The next portion of the passage continues with Jesus instructing His disciples to teach others all what they have learned from Him: “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (v. 20a). It is clear here that Jesus expects His disciples to obey His teachings and to teach others to obey as well. Craig Blomberg comments, “Teaching obedience to all of Jesus’ commands forms the heart of disciple making. Evangelism must be holistic. . . . If new converts are not faithfully and lovingly nurtured in the whole counsel of God’s revelation, then the church has disobeyed the other part.”⁸⁹ Making disciples, growing into the likeness of Jesus, is a Holy Spirit dependent process that should continue throughout one’s life. Blomberg rightly points out, “Making disciples involves: ‘baptizing’ them and ‘teaching’ them obedience to all of Jesus’ commandments. The first of these will be a once-for-all, decisive initiation into Christian community. The second proves a perennially incomplete, life-long task.”⁹⁰ This life-long mission is of crucial importance for each local church. Hagner indicates, “It is the particular responsibility of the church to hand on that teaching and to see to it that new disciples make it their way of life.”⁹¹ A church that fails to teach its members and encourage Spirit-dependent obedience to the commandments of Jesus is a church that is failing its most important task and responsibility. According to O’Donnell, “Christian churches are only Christian if they center on Christ’s commands”⁹² and preach Christ from all Scripture. Christ-centered preaching for the purpose of growing into being like Him in obedience, and encouraging other disciples to grow in the same, should be a central task in the practice of discipleship at every local church.

⁸⁹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 432.

⁹⁰ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

⁹¹ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 888.

⁹² O’Donnell, *Matthew*, 917.

Conclusion

The apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthians to be imitators of him because he was an imitator of Christ (1 Cor 11:1). Being a disciple entails imitating the Master Jesus Christ, and in discipleship, believers encourage each other to grow in this purpose. Disciples are transformed into the likeness of Christ not through their own strengths or will but through the power of the Holy Spirit. Disciples grow into imitating Christ's obedience, His practice of spiritual disciplines, fellowship among believers, and reaching the lost by sharing the gospel in the mission of making more disciples.

CHAPTER 3

HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL BASIS FOR DISCIPLESHIP

The lives of genuine believers throughout the history of the church demonstrate discipleship practices and teachings related to spiritual disciplines, obedience to God’s moral laws, loving fellowship among believers, and the active and intentional pursuit of making other disciples through the preaching of the gospel. Personal and corporate practices of biblical discipleship throughout history have resulted toward growth in Spirit-dependent Christlikeness. Gregg Allison points out, “The church has historically affirmed that part of the believer’s experience of salvation is growing into Christian maturity.”¹ Past saints also demonstrate and serve as an example that discipleship is costly, as those who followed Christ submitted completely to his divine, perfect, and sovereign will. These same realities continue to be expected from present-day followers. The contemporary church can learn from the saints of the past what it really means to be a disciple of Jesus.

Many church fathers (including Tertullian and Cyprian), reformers (such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli), and Puritans (like John Owen, Thomas Watson), along with more contemporary Christians (such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Donald Whitney, Colin Marshall, Tony Payne, J. T. English, Tedd Tripp, Jerry Bridges), have taught significantly about the subject and practice of discipleship. How the saints of the past have believed and lived as followers/disciples of Jesus represent, as pointed by

¹ Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 524.

Allison, “stellar examples of faith, love, courage, hope, obedience and mercy”² to believers of today and especially those genuine Christians seeking to live faithfully and obediently for our Lord Jesus Christ. Allison notes how “early Christians such as Polycarp, Perpetua, and Felicitas were threatened with death if they would not renounce their faith in Jesus Christ, and they died as martyrs rather than deny the Lord who had saved them.”³

Discipleship and Sanctification

Growing in holiness and sanctification is the main goal of discipleship. Sanctification is both, and at the same time, positional and progressive. It is positional in the sense that those chosen by God are already declared saints “in Christ” through His perfect obedience and substitutionary/redemptive sacrifice. The progressive aspect of sanctification applies to believers in the context of their fallen nature in this corrupted world while awaiting glorification, and in this sense, progressive sanctification is a cooperative work of God and man (also known as a synergistic process). Tertullian, a church father, “articulated an important principle regarding Christians being *in*, but not *of*, the world,”⁴ and in this regard, Christians should be watchful in not participating in the sins of this fallen world but instead growing in holiness.

In relation to the progressive and cooperative aspects of sanctification, Allison points out, “Among the roles that God performs is setting believers apart from sin, providing the example of Jesus Christ’s obedience, and supplying the power and resources of the Holy Spirit to lead Christians into deepening holiness of life.”⁵ Christopher Hall

² Allison, *Historical Theology*, 25.

³ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 25.

⁴ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 523.

⁵ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 520.

indicates how the Holy Spirit nurtures intimacy with God.⁶ Basil points out, as cited by Hall, that “it is impossible to maintain a life of holiness without the Spirit. It would be easier for an army to continue its maneuvers without a general, or for a choir to sing on key without its director.”⁷ Believers cooperate by putting into practice the tools of sanctification (also known as means of grace) that God gives them to achieve their role in their progression toward Christian maturity and Christlikeness. These means of grace, as indicated by Allison, include but are not limited to, “prayer, reading and meditating on Scripture, the mortification of the flesh, confession of sin, and self-discipline.”⁸ It is also important to point out how complete human sinlessness or perfection in the Christian life is not possible in our current fallen nature. Believers grow in holiness, but perfection is not attainable in this world, only Christ was perfect. Clement of Alexandria stated, “I know of no one [who is] perfect in all things at the same time, as long as he is still human. . . . The only exception is Christ alone, who clothed himself with humanity for us.”⁹ Christ was perfect in all things and at the same time, and every act of his obedience was substitutionary in order to fulfill the law on behalf of his chosen people (who were incapable of doing so). Disciples are called to imitate Christ’s character and obedience, but only through his substitution (he alone is the perfect one) they can engage in imitation. Only in Christ alone, by Christ’s power alone, for the glory of God alone, can disciples grow in imitating his character.

Discipleship practices are not to be done in a legalistic manner. Believer’s obedience and the practice of spiritual disciplines cannot earn salvation (which is not by works, but by grace through faith in Christ alone). Salvation belongs to the Lord (Ps 62:1;

⁶ Christopher A. Hall, *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 118.

⁷ Basil, quoted in Hall, *Learning Theology*, 284.

⁸ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 520.

⁹ Clement of Alexandria, quoted in Allison, *Historical Theology*, 524.

Jon. 2:9; Rev. 7:10), and it is a work of God from the beginning to the end. The God who justifies is also the God who sanctifies (1 Pet 1:1-2), as the Holy Spirit produces growth into maturity and Christlikeness in His people (1 Cor 6:11). J. T. English indicates, “The New Testament gives us the paradoxical picture that the Christian life is entirely of grace but that we are also called to grow in that grace . . . grace creates growth. Those who have received the grace of Christ also want to grow in Christ.”¹⁰ Rather than obeying and growing in a legalistic manner, genuine disciples practice what Jesus commanded out of love for God and others (Mark 12:30-31). Only after being recipients of the gospel by grace from God, in new birth and regeneration, then, as noted by English, “the reception of the gospel creates a desire in disciples to grow in the gospel,”¹¹ consequently resulting in Christians who strain forward in pursuing maturity, training themselves for godliness (1 Tim 4:7), holiness, and Christlikeness.

Discipleship practices (e.g., prayer and fasting) should not be associated with mysticism. According to Alan Cairns, mysticism can be understood as “the search for a higher initiation into spiritual mysteries, or a higher consecration to spiritual realities, or a union with deity, by a withdrawal from the external world and by means of contemplation.”¹² Mysticism is dangerous because it pursues spirituality and truths the wrong way—through experiential connection with supernatural powers and the divine by means of higher consecration, contemplation, and rituals apart from the revealed Word of God. The practice of discipleship in Christianity and mysticism are mutually exclusive. Sadly, some mystic practices have infiltrated many self-proclaimed Christians movements and churches. An example of this practice is infiltration of eastern meditation rather than biblical prayer. Richard Foster, a Quaker theologian, manifest concerns on

¹⁰ J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2020), 137.

¹¹ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 138.

¹² Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald, 2002), s.v. “mysticism,” 293.

how eastern meditation, which “is an attempt to empty the mind,”¹³ is in reality contrary to Christian meditation, which rather than emptying the mind, pursuit filling the mind with God’s Word. Gregg Hammond comments that attempts to empty the mind “are indicative not of true Christian meditation, dwelling on the Word, but of a mystical non-Christian method more closely related to transcendental meditation.”¹⁴ Christian meditation and prayer, rather than pursuing the emptiness of mind, should pursue the fullness of it with the Word of God (Phil 4:8; 1 Tim 4:15). Alan Cairns states, “To meditate deeply and continuously upon a scriptural theme, in a prayerful spirit, will mortify the flesh, and be a means of sweet communion with the Lord.”¹⁵ Consequently, in genuine, unaltered, and biblical Christianity, “higher consecration can be experienced only through a progressive sanctification or conformity to Christ, which is a work of God’s Spirit, not the product of a course of contemplation.”¹⁶

The Teaching and Practice of Discipleship by Prior Saints

Throughout history, many genuine Christians have been persecuted for their faith in Jesus. Regardless of this intense persecution, however, discipleship practices have been an important factor contributing to their success in growing into spiritual maturity as many faced hardships and trials. Even though “by the end of the third century Christians made up a sizeable minority of the population of the Roman Empire,”¹⁷ Christianity survived, in the divine providence of God, by the unity and encouragement that these

¹³ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), 24.

¹⁴ Greg Hammond, *Mystic Seduction: Awakening Christians to a Real and Present Danger* (N.p: n.p., 2014), 281, Kindle.

¹⁵ Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, s.v. “mysticism,” 293-94.

¹⁶ Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, s.v. “mysticism,” 293.

¹⁷ Everett Ferguson, *From Christ to Pre-Reformation*, vol. 1 of *Church History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 175.

discipleship practices brought to the church. These early Christians were faithful in the teaching of biblical truths to one another. They were also diligent and effective in demonstrating “brotherly love”¹⁸ in deep fellowship, and in practicing spiritual disciplines, all of which gave them “a strong sense of community.”¹⁹ The discipleship practices also helped them in their personal growth toward Christlikeness and in the numerical growth of the church. God continued advancing His kingdom. More faithful disciples who continued pursuing Christlikeness and teaching the truth to others were being added to His church.

The Teachings and Practices of Spiritual Disciplines by Prior Saints

Throughout history, faithful and genuine Christians have devoted themselves, both personally and corporately, to practicing spiritual disciplines. Christians in the early apostolic age frequently met, as noted by Everett Ferguson, for “prayer, singing, reading from Scripture, and messages of instructions and exhortation.”²⁰ Some would meet daily and others at a minimum on the Lord’s Day, relating “their daily observance of prayer to Jesus and his teachings about prayer.”²¹ Prayers, Scripture intake, and fasting were among the most important and common disciplines practiced and taught by prior disciples of Christ throughout history.

Prayer. The spiritual discipline of prayer has been intensely practiced and taught by saints of the past. Tertullian taught extensively about prayer in twenty-nine chapters of his writings. He pointed out, “Jesus Christ our Lord . . . has determined for us, the disciples of the New Testament, a new form of prayer; for in this particular also it was

¹⁸ Ferguson, *From Christ to Pre-Reformation*, 176.

¹⁹ Ferguson, *From Christ to Pre-Reformation*, 176.

²⁰ Ferguson, *From Christ to Pre-Reformation*, 44.

²¹ Ferguson, *From Christ to Pre-Reformation*, 44.

needful that new wine should be laid up in new skins, and a new breadth be sewn to a new garment.”²² Tertullian enumerated Christ’s method of prayer, to which he referred as a “heavenly” one, full of wisdom, “touching the precept of praying secretly,”²³ a prayer that is practiced modestly in faith. Tertullian also discouraged the use of many words, stating that prayer “be it in veneration of God or petition for man, but almost every discourse of the Lord, every record of *His* Discipline; so that, in fact, in the Prayer is comprised an epitome of the whole Gospel.”²⁴ He emphasized the attitude of prayer (in modesty, in veneration of God, praying the gospel) as it was taught by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, and also how believers should practice praying according to the will of Christ for them as stated in the gospel.

Tertullian also provided believers of the second and third centuries a patristic commentary about the Lord’s Prayer. He emphasized how Christians should pray according to God’s will: “What, moreover, *does* God will, but that we should walk according to His Discipline? We make petition, then, that He supplies us with the substance of His will, and the capacity to do it.”²⁵ He indicated how Christ gave himself for his Father’s will, and consequently, Christ’s followers should imitate him, praying for God to give them strength to do the same. Tertullian also commented regarding the relationship between brothers prior to prayers, especially if there is anger against a brother: “When, set in ‘the way’ of prayer, we go not unto ‘the Father’ with anger. After that, the Lord, ‘amplifying the Law,’ openly adds *the prohibition of anger against a brother to that of*

²² Tertullian, *On Prayer*, in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 3 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 681.

²³ Tertullian, *On Prayer*, 681.

²⁴ Tertullian, *On Prayer*, 681.

²⁵ Tertullian, *On Prayer*, 682.

murder.”²⁶ Allison cites how Tertullian related prayers to divine protection, as Tertullian pointed out that “prayer is the wall of faith: her arms and missiles against the foe, who keeps watch over us on all sides. So we never walk unarmed.”²⁷ Further indication of the importance of prayers by the early church is noted in their frequency of prayers, as they used to pray seven times a day (Prime or early morning prayer, Matins or morning prayer, Terce/third or prayer at 9:00 a.m., Sext/sixth or prayer at noon, None/ninth or prayer at 3:00 p.m., Vespers or evening prayer, and Compline or prayer before going to bed).²⁸

Another church father that contributed to the discipline of prayer, and instructed believers in the early centuries of Christianity, was Cyprian of Carthage, in his *Treatise On the Lord’s Prayer*. In the first portion of his treatise, he indicates, “The Lord’s prayer is the most excellent of all prayers, profoundly spiritual, and most effectual for obtaining our petitions.”²⁹ In the second part of the treatise, the editors note that “he undertakes an explanation of the Lord’s Prayer . . . he goes through its seven chief clauses,” and in its final part, “he considers the conditions of prayers, and tells us what prayer ought to be.”³⁰ Cyprian instructed the Christians of the third and fourth centuries to follow the pattern taught by Christ when praying:

Let us therefore, brethren beloved, pray as God our Teacher has taught us. It is a loving and friendly prayer to beseech God with His own word, to come up to His ears in the prayer of Christ. Let the Father acknowledge the words of His Son when we make our prayer, and let Him also who dwells within in our breast Himself dwell in our voice. And since we have Him as an Advocate with the Father for our sins, let us, when as sinners we petition on behalf of our sins, put forward the words of our Advocate. For since He says, that “whatsoever we shall ask of the Father in His name, He will give us,” how much more effectually do we obtain what we ask in

²⁶ Tertullian, *On Prayer*, 685.

²⁷ Tertullian, quoted in Allison, *Historical Theology*, 525.

²⁸ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 526.

²⁹ Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Lord’s Prayer*, in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, vol. 5 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1886), 447.

³⁰ Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Lord’s Prayer*, 447.

Christ's name, if we ask for it in His own prayer! But let our speech and petition when we pray be under discipline, observing quietness and modesty. Let us consider that we are standing in God's sight.³¹

Many reformers and Puritans also acknowledged the great importance of the spiritual discipline of prayer for growing into Christian maturity and Christlikeness, and encouraged believers to practice it. Donald Whitney points out how Martin Luther was a praying man who “expressed God's expectation of prayer this way: ‘As it is the business of tailors to make clothes and of cobblers to mend shoes, so it is the business of Christians to pray.’”³² John Calvin encouraged believers of the necessity of the spiritual discipline of prayer:

Words fail to explain how necessary prayer is, and in how many ways the exercise of prayer is profitable. Surely, with good reason the Heavenly Father affirms that the only stronghold of safety is in calling upon his name [cf. Joel 2:32]. By so doing we invoke the presence both of his providence, through which he watches over and guards our affairs, and of his power, through which he sustains us, weak as we are and well-nigh overcome, and of his goodness, through which he receives us, miserably burdened with sins, unto grace; and, in short, it is by prayer that we call him to reveal himself as wholly present to us.³³

Puritan John Bunyan also contributed on this issue, highly encouraging believers in practicing this discipline and instructing them on the appropriate posture of their hearts when talking to God in prayer. Bunyan indicated that, in prayers, men draw very near to God, and that “it is not long discourses, nor eloquent tongues, that are the things which are pleasing in the ears of the Lord; but a humble, broken, and contrite heart, that is sweet in the nostrils of the heavenly Majesty.”³⁴

The many examples and teachings from prior saints regarding prayer serve as an encouragement for today's disciples to imitate them. Foster indicates, “Of all the

³¹ Cyprian of Carthage, *On the Lord's Prayer*, 448.

³² Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 68.

³³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 1:851.

³⁴ John Bunyan, *A Discourse Touching Prayer* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2006), 1:636.

Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father,”³⁵ and furthermore, “all who have walked with God have viewed prayer as the main business of their lives . . . [it] was no little habit tacked on the periphery of their lives; it was their lives.”³⁶ Whitney also makes an important point of connecting prayers with passages of the Bible as a way to ensure praying the will of God and encourages believers: “When you pray, pray through a passage of Scripture.”³⁷ Genuine disciples pray constantly as they seek frequent conversations with the God they love.

Scripture intake. The spiritual discipline of Scripture intake has been intensely practiced and taught by saints of the past, including but not limiting to church fathers like Augustine of Hippo, Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus, reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Puritans like Thomas Watson. Italian scholar of patristic history, Manlio Simonetti, saw this clearly in his studies of patristic exegesis: “Holy Scripture, regarded as the fruit of divine revelation for the good of the Church, occupies an absolutely fundamental place: every action in the life of the community, collective or individual, from doctrine to discipline and worship, should be shaped by it.”³⁸ The church father Augustine dedicated a great amount of his writings to encouraging Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries to read, meditate, and live according to Scripture. Augustine emphasized the right way to read and interpret Scripture, considering the intended meaning of the text. Augustine pointed out that application should be based on original meaning, indicating, “Whoever takes another meaning out of Scripture than the writer intended,

³⁵ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 40.

³⁶ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 43.

³⁷ Donald S. Whitney, *Praying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 37.

³⁸ Manlio Simonetti, *Biblical Interpretation in the Early Church: An Historical Introduction to Patristic Exegesis* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 1.

goes astray, but not through any falsehood in Scripture.”³⁹ Scriptural intake is also important because of its authority, sufficiency, and necessity in the life of every follower of Christ. Allison points out how the church has historically acknowledged and recognized the necessity of scriptural intake and what it signifies for believers of all times: “The necessity of Scripture means that the Bible is necessary for knowing the gospel, for maintaining spiritual life, and for knowing God’s will . . . [and] because God has designed to reveal all this through his written Word, the people of God must know and live by Scripture.”⁴⁰

All of these truths taught by the church fathers justify why Christ’s followers should and must engage in practicing daily Bible readings and meditations as part of their discipleship journey. Theonas of Alexandria underscored, “Let no day pass by without reading some portion of the Sacred Scriptures, at such convenient hour as offers, and giving some space to meditation. And never cast off the habit of reading in the Holy Scriptures; for nothing feeds the soul and enriches the mind so well as those sacred studies do.”⁴¹ Augustine affirmed, “God had clearly revealed in his Word whatever was necessary for Christians to know.”⁴² Clement of Alexandria viewed Scripture as authoritative because in it the voice of God is heard, claiming, “He, then, who of himself believes the Scripture and the voice of the Lord, which by the Lord acts to the benefit of men, is rightly regarded as faithful.”⁴³ Irenaeus encouraged Christians to meditate in the truths that God revealed to humanity, noticing its clarity by pointing out, “The entire Scriptures—the

³⁹ Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, in *St. Augustin’s City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. F. Shaw, vol. 2 of *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), 533.

⁴⁰ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 142.

⁴¹ Theonas of Alexandria, quoted in Allison, *Historical Theology*, 145.

⁴² Augustine, quoted in Allison, *Historical Theology*, 124.

⁴³ Clement of Alexandria, quoted in Allison, *Historical Theology*, 80.

Prophets and the Gospels—can be clearly, unambiguously, and harmoniously understood by all, although all do not believe them.”⁴⁴ Irenaeus also wrote about the importance of reading and studying Scripture in the context of the whole counsel of God, insisting that those who read the Scripture with attention “will find in them an account of Christ, and a foreshadowing of the new calling,”⁴⁵ intending that “foreshadowing of Christ are peppered throughout the Old Testament literature.”⁴⁶ This insistence was a response to the heresy of Marcionism that attempted to disconnect the Old Testament from the New Testament. Irenaeus also contributed to the church by teaching the Christians of the second and third centuries how to read and interpret difficult passages, advocating, as pointed by Hall that “ambiguous passages must be interpreted in light of passages that are clear and straightforward,”⁴⁷ which later became one of the general principles in the field of hermeneutics. Irenaeus called his readers “to develop a sound mind . . . devoted to piety and the love of the truth,”⁴⁸ and later defined a devout or sound mind as one who will “eagerly meditate upon those things which God has placed within the power of humankind, and has subjected to our knowledge, and will make advancement in [acquaintance with] them, rendering the knowledge of them easy to him by means of daily study.”⁴⁹ With this information, one sees how the church fathers encouraged Scripture intake to achieve Christian maturity and grow in holiness; consequently, this practice is vital in each believer’s discipleship journey.

⁴⁴ Irenaeus, quoted in Allison, *Historical Theology*, 122.

⁴⁵ Irenaeus, quoted in Hall, *Learning Theology*, 213.

⁴⁶ Hall, *Learning Theology*, 213.

⁴⁷ Hall, *Learning Theology*, 213.

⁴⁸ Irenaeus, quoted in Hall, *Learning Theology*, 213.

⁴⁹ Irenaeus, quoted in Hall, *Learning Theology*, 213.

Many reformers and Puritans throughout history also faithfully practiced and encouraged the Christians of their time in the spiritual discipline of daily Scripture intake. Martin Luther directly linked sanctification to Scripture intake, pointing out that the “desires of the flesh are overcome . . . only by the earnest meditation of the Word of God and invocation of Christ.”⁵⁰ John Calvin directly connected true religion and sound doctrine with being an active and persevering learner of Scripture, stating, “In order that true religion may shine upon us, we ought to hold that it must take its beginning from heavenly doctrine and that no one can get even the slightest taste of right and sound doctrine unless he be a pupil of Scripture.”⁵¹ Puritan Thomas Watson highlighted how a genuine disciple of Jesus (“a godly man”) is somebody who loves his Word, who loves Scripture, and furthermore, who shows his love for the Word by diligently reading it, meditating on it, delighting in it, defending it, preferring it above things most precious, talking about it, and most importantly, by being conformed and molded to it.⁵²

So many examples and teachings from prior saints regarding Scripture intake serve as an encouragement for today’s disciples to also imitate. Kenneth Boa indicates, “Study of Scripture involves not only reading but also active involvement in observation, interpretation, and application of its contents.”⁵³ Scripture intake also has an essential role for parents in instructing and training their children in the Lord’s way, particularly in a society that more and more every day hates the truth contained in God’s Word. Tedd Tripp explains, “The only safe guide is the Bible. It is the revelation of a God who has infinite knowledge and can therefore give you absolute truth. . . . It presents an accurate

⁵⁰ Elmer L. Towns, “Martin Luther on Sanctification,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126 (1969): 121.

⁵¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 72.

⁵² Thomas Watson, *The Godly Man’s Picture* (1966; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2013), 60-63.

⁵³ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 83-84.

and comprehensive picture of children, parents, family life, values, training, nurture and discipline.”⁵⁴

Fasting. The spiritual discipline of fasting has also been practiced and taught by many saints of the past. Whitney indicates, “Fasting is the most feared and misunderstood of all the spiritual disciplines,”⁵⁵ which is unfortunate because it has caused many contemporary believers to neglect this important discipline that was practiced by Jesus, the church fathers, many reformers, Puritans, and many other saints of the past. It is understandable that some Christians are not able to fast due to medical conditions, and in those cases, they should not do it, or if they do it, it should be limited, with medical supervision, and/or approved by their physicians. However, if no medical contraindication exists, Christ followers are expected to fast, as clearly indicated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

Fasting has been a historical practice of the church (usually accompanied with a dedicated time of Scripture reading, meditations on it, and prayers), and this discipline needs to be restored by the church of today and in which contemporary believers need to be biblically and historically educated by their leaders. Tertullian advocated for this spiritual discipline, but at the same time warned about extremism. Tertullian opposed a group that he called “Psychics” who were against the spiritual discipline of fasting: “I should wonder at the Psychics, if they were enthralled to voluptuousness alone, which leads them to repeated marriages, if they were not likewise bursting with gluttony, which leads them to hate fasts.”⁵⁶ In his defense of fasting, he traced the principle of this

⁵⁴ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 1995), xix.

⁵⁵ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 159.

⁵⁶ Tertullian, *On Fasting in Opposition to the Psychics*, in *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 4 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 102.

discipline back to its earliest source in the Old Testament: “For the necessity of the observance will then be acknowledged, when the authority of a rationale, to be dated back from the very beginning, shall have shone out to view.”⁵⁷ Tertullian made an allegory of the command from God to Adam regarding not eating from the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil, and he related the fall of Adam with the lack of specific fasting, as Adam “yielded more readily to his belly than to God, heeded the meat rather than the mandate, and sold salvation for his gullet! He ate, in short, and perished; saved (as he would) else (have been), if he had preferred to fast from one little tree.”⁵⁸ In his treatise on fasting, Tertullian continued to bring more examples from the Old Testament in favor of fasting, including stories related to Moses, Elijah, Daniel and his brethren (“preferring as they did a diet of vegetables and the beverage of water to the royal dishes and decanters”⁵⁹), and many others, along with evidence in the New Testament, including examples from Jesus and the apostle Paul. Tertullian indicated,

The LORD Himself consecrated His own baptism (and, in His own, that of all) by fasts; having (the power) to make “loaves out of stones,” ay, to make Jordan flow with wine perchance, if He had been such a “glutton and toper.” Nay, rather, by the virtue of contemning food He was initiating “the new man” into “a severe handling” of “the old,” that He might show that (new man) to the devil, again seeking to tempt him by means of *food*, (to be) too strong for the whole power of hunger. Thereafter He prescribed to fasts a law—that they are to be performed “without sadness:” for why should what is salutary be sad? He taught likewise that fasts are to be the weapons for battling with the more direful demons: for what wonder if the same operation is the instrument of the iniquitous spirit’s egress as of the Holy Spirit’s ingress? Finally, granting that upon the centurion Cornelius, even *before baptism*, the honourable gift of the Holy Spirit, together with the gift of prophecy besides, had hastened to descend, we see that *his fasts* had been heard. I think, moreover, that the apostle too, in the Second of Corinthians, among his labours, and perils, and hardships, after “hunger and thirst,” enumerates “fasts” also “very many.”⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Tertullian, *On Fasting in Opposition to the Psychics*, 103.

⁵⁸ Tertullian, *On Fasting in Opposition to the Psychics*, 103-4.

⁵⁹ Tertullian, *On Fasting in Opposition to the Psychics*, 107.

⁶⁰ Tertullian, *On Fasting in Opposition to the Psychics*, 107.

While Tertullian encouraged and was in favor of the discipline of fasting, his treatise also warned against extremism in this practice. Tertullian condemned groups that exaggerated the discipline of fasting and distorted its biblical purpose. He opposed “the heretics who would enjoin *perpetual* abstinence to the extent of destroying and despising the works of the Creator; such as I may find in the person of a Marcion, a Tatian, or a Jupiter, the Pythagorean heretic of today; not in the person of the Paraclete.”⁶¹

John Calvin also encouraged believers to practice the discipline of fasting, warning Christians that it should not be done in a mechanical or superstitious way, but rather from the heart, urging believers “to ‘rend their hearts, not their garments’ [Joel 2:13]”⁶² and pointing out that “God does not greatly esteem fasting of itself, unless an inner emotion of the heart is present, and true displeasure at one’s sin, true humility, and true sorrowing arising from the fear of God.”⁶³

Arthur Hildersham, a Puritan of the seventeenth century, instructed believers of his time regarding the things to do and/or to consider doing while fasting, which included reading and preaching the Word (he cited Neh 9:3 and Jere 36:5-6 in support), singing of the psalms (citing 2 Chr 20:19; Eph 5:18-19), prayers (citing Acts 10:4) and examining their souls for sin concomitantly with pursuing repentance and obedience (citing Neh 10:29).⁶⁴ Hildersham also instructed believers on things not to do while fasting, such as avoiding all manners of food and drink (he cited Esth 4:16; Jonah 3:37; and Ezra 10:6 in support), and avoiding delights of all sorts, including the marriage bed and recreations whatsoever (he cited 1 Cor 7:5; Joel 2:16; Isa 58:3).⁶⁵ Hildersham also

⁶¹ Tertullian, *On Fasting in Opposition to the Psychics*, 112.

⁶² Calvin, *Institutes*, 1245.

⁶³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1245.

⁶⁴ Arthur Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation for Sin* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2017), 46-48.

⁶⁵ Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation for Sin*, 48-51.

indicated, “This outward abstinence is not the chief part of a true fast nor the chief help to our prayers. The inward humiliation of the soul is far more acceptable to God and has more force to make our prayers pierce the heavens than all this.”⁶⁶

In light of examples and teachings from saints of the past, today’s disciples would benefit spiritually by incorporating the practice of fasting into their lives. Unfortunately, as stated, this is a neglected discipline in many believers today. Foster points out how Christ’s “teachings on fasting is directly in the context of his teachings on giving and praying. . . . We have no reason to exclude fasting from the teaching that we do giving or praying.”⁶⁷ There is no biblical justification for neglecting this discipline if a person is able to do it, in moderation and without excesses, if no medical contraindications, and in connection with prayer and studying the Word of God. Paul David Washer indicates, “As genuine fasting reveals a passion for God and a dependence upon His power as well as a concern for others, the neglect of fasting may be an indicator of apathy toward God and excessive delight in or dependence upon self and the temporal pleasures of this world.”⁶⁸ John Piper relates Christian fasting with having “a hunger for all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19), aroused by the aroma of Jesus’s love and by the taste of God’s goodness in the gospel of Christ (1 Peter 2:2-3).”⁶⁹ All the mentioned historical and contemporary saints give clear biblical and theoretical arguments that the discipline of fasting needs to be restored in practice by today’s disciples.

⁶⁶ Hildersham, *Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation for Sin*, 51.

⁶⁷ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 64-65.

⁶⁸ Paul David Washer, *Understanding the Discipline of Fasting* (Redford, VA: HeartCry, 2021), 14.

⁶⁹ John Piper, *A Hunger for God, Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 43.

Having completed an examination of the spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible intake, and fasting, the following section will address obedience to God’s Word by prior saints throughout the history of the church.

The Teachings and Practices of Obedience by Prior Saints

Historically, the church has embraced the expectation that the disciples of Jesus grow in obedience to His commands and teachings. An orthodox belief has also been that the Christian’s obedience will never be perfected while in this fallen world, as only the God-man Christ obeyed perfectly, and it is only through faith in Jesus’s substitutionary sacrifice that salvation comes to believers. Allison writes, “The righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed, or credited, to the account of those who believe in him, and their sin is imputed to him (2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 5:19).”⁷⁰

As early as the second and third centuries, the church fathers understood the fruit of obedience as evidence of genuine work of regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and subsequent repentance and conversion of the believers. For example, in the *Didache* there is reflection of the moral teachings adopted by early Christianity, in which, as noted by Ferguson, “the Ten Commandments were elaborated so that the prohibition of killing included abortion and abandoning young children, and the prohibition of adultery included fornication and homosexual practices.”⁷¹ At the same time there was primarily “an emphasis on the attitudes of the heart as well as the outward actions.”⁷² Augustine encouraged Christians in the early church that the fulfillment and end of Scripture is the love of God and neighbor and to that end he wrote, “Of all, then, that has been said . . . this is the sum: that we should clearly understand that the fulfillment and the end of the

⁷⁰ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 390.

⁷¹ Ferguson, *From Christ to Pre-Reformation*, 154.

⁷² Ferguson, *From Christ to Pre-Reformation*, 154.

Law, and of all Holy Scripture, is the love of an object which is to be enjoyed, and the love of an object which can enjoy that other in fellowship with ourselves.”⁷³

Martin Luther linked the work of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God in the process of believers’ sanctification, “God’s Word is holy and sanctifies everything it touches; Nay, it is the very holiness of God. (Moreover) the Holy Ghost Himself administers it and anoints and sanctifies the Church that is, the Christian, holy people with it.”⁷⁴ Luther also provided a great illustration on how the work of God in the believer precedes obedience and sanctification, indicating, “Just so no one becomes a bishop by doing the works of a bishop, but after he has been made a bishop, he does the works of a bishop. So the works of faith do not make faith, but faith does the works of faith.”⁷⁵

Calvin linked knowing God with obeying him, stating, “Hence, there also emerges the beginning of true understanding when we reverently embrace what it pleases God there to witness of himself. But not only faith, perfect and in every way complete, but all right knowledge of God is born of obedience.”⁷⁶ He also linked knowing God and the truth in Scripture, and his consequent obedience, with the work of the Holy Spirit: “Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning.”⁷⁷ Calvin clearly indicated how empowerment from the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is the only reason for which believers are able to be obedient to the law of God and grow in conformation into the character of Jesus: “By this

⁷³ Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, 532-33.

⁷⁴ Martin Luther, quoted in Towns, “Martin Luther on Sanctification,” 118.

⁷⁵ Martin Luther, quoted in Towns, “Martin Luther on Sanctification,” 118.

⁷⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 72.

⁷⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 80.

power we are drawn and inflamed, knowingly and willingly, to obey him, yet also more vitally and more effectively than by mere human willing or knowing!”⁷⁸

Many Puritans also conveyed how the pursuit of growing in obedience is a characteristic of genuine disciples of Jesus. John Owen, in his work *The Mortification of Sin*, encourages believers to seek obedience, noticing that “you cannot mortify a specific lust that is troubling you, unless you are seeking to obey the Lord from the heart in all areas!”⁷⁹ At the same time he acknowledged that this process is through a “supply of grace” that comes from God and that “we cannot do it by ourselves.”⁸⁰ He also indicated. “Christ is the fountain from which the new man must draw the influences of life and strength. . . . Only Christ and the means appointed by Him will give you lasting help.”⁸¹ Watson contributed to this subject by noticing how a genuine believer fights sin and longs for obedience: “A godly man does not indulge sin . . . sin in a wicked man is delightful, being in its natural place, but sin in a child of God is burdensome and he uses all means to expel it.”⁸² John Owen, in his work *The Communion with God*, also noticed how the believer’s obedience to Christ flows out of gratitude and love toward him, as they reflect on the great grace and benefits received from him: “Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more . . . He abundantly pardons . . . He sheds the Spirit on us abundantly. . . . Supplies from Christ does not fail.”⁸³ After reflecting on all the goodness of Christ, Owen

⁷⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 80.

⁷⁹ John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1656), 49,

⁸⁰ Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, 121.

⁸¹ Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, 121.

⁸² Watson, *The Godly Man’s Picture*, 147.

⁸³ John Owen, *Communion with God* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 116-17.

then asked, “In view, then, of all Christ’s goodness to us, what is our duty to him?”⁸⁴ to which he answered,

Our first duty to Christ is to practice holiness in the power of the Spirit. . . . Believers obey Christ as the author of their faith and obedience . . . [and] in all their obedience, saints have a special regard to their dear Lord Jesus. He is continually in their thoughts. His love to them, his life to them, his death for them, all his mercy and all his kindness constrains them to live to him.⁸⁵

Growing in obedience to God, should not be done out of obligation, legalism, or moralism; true and genuine disciples that obey and follow Christ are motivated by love and gratitude to him.

In light of such rich evidence from the past on how disciples, out of love for God and as a result of the grace of salvation, intentionally pursued obedience to God’s commands, believers today are also expected to grow in holiness and obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit within them. Jerry Bridges, in *The Discipline of Grace*, indicates “If we are to love God with all our heart and soul and mind, and if obedience is a major part of such love, then it follows that we are to obey Him with all our heart, soul, and mind. We are to put everything we have into obedience to Him.”⁸⁶ R. C. Sproul recalls believers of their purpose, pointing out, “If we want to experience greater Christlikeness, we need to intentionally plan to grow.”⁸⁷ He also writes that God is glorified when His holiness is reflected in His children: “God is holy, and we are to reflect that holiness. . . . It is growing within us. . . . We were made to glorify God and to bear witness to the whole cosmos about His Character.”⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Owen, *Communion with God*, 117.

⁸⁵ Owen, *Communion with God*, 117.

⁸⁶ Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 110.

⁸⁷ R. C. Sproul, *Growing in Holiness: Understanding God’s Role and Yours* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 14.

⁸⁸ Sproul, *Growing in Holiness*, 17-18.

The Teachings and Practices of Fellowship by Prior Saints

Throughout history, faithful and genuine Christians have joined in community together to equip each other and serve each other in loving fellowship, united to one another through their faith in Christ. Justin Martyr, in *The First Apology of Justin*, provides a vivid picture of the unity and the serving of one another that characterized the Christians of the second century: “We . . . continually remind each other of these things. And the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things wherewith we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Ghost.”⁸⁹ When he says “continually remind each other of these things,” he is referring to how they constantly talked to one another about the gospel and the teachings of Jesus Christ, and in this sense, an integral part of their fellowship together was encouraging and counseling one another in all the instructions they have received from Christ and subsequently the apostles. Justin Martyr then continued narrating their practice of gathering together for the purpose of worshiping God in the Lord’s day:

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read . . . then the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray . . . when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought . . . and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given. . . . And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.⁹⁰

He also argued that there was a close unity among the Christian community in the early church, characterized by equipping each other with the Word, praying for each other,

⁸⁹ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 185-86.

⁹⁰ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, 186.

sharing meals together, and being watchful for the necessities of one another, with special attention to orphans, widows, and those suffering with various sickness among them.⁹¹

Calvin commented regarding the communion and fellowship, a common characteristic of all genuine believers: “If truly convinced that God is the common Father of all and Christ the common Head, being united in brotherly love, they cannot but share their benefits with one another.”⁹² The greatest benefits believers have received is being recipients of the manifestation of the love of God in their salvation through the suffering of the cross by Jesus. In the same way, believers share this love with one another in the way they care for each other and how they teach truths (the teachings and commands of Jesus) to one another for all to grow in the likeness of Jesus. Calvin indicated, “All those who, by the kindness of God the Father, through the working of the Holy Spirit, have entered into fellowship with Christ, are set apart as God’s property and personal possession; and that when we are of their number we share that great grace.”⁹³

John Owen instructed believers of the multiple characteristics that should be present in genuine disciples of Christ as they practice fellowship in community with other believers. He pointed out how believers should pursue loving one another as Christ loved the church,⁹⁴ “maintain an unremitting care and effort to preserve unity,”⁹⁵ “engage in frequent spiritual conversation for edification, according to the measure of their gifts,”⁹⁶

⁹¹ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, 186.

⁹² Calvin, *Institutes*, 1015.

⁹³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1015-16.

⁹⁴ John Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2017), 33.

⁹⁵ Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, 43.

⁹⁶ Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, 52.

bear one another burdens,⁹⁷ watch one another behavior, correct one another if needed,⁹⁸ and also “live in an exemplary way in all holiness and godliness, to the glory of the gospel, the edification of the church, and the conviction of those outside the church.”⁹⁹

In light of so many examples and teachings from prior saints regarding living in loving fellowship as disciples of Christ, believers today should be known for doing the same. Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, in noticing the way Paul discipled Timothy, pointed out how the “transfer of the good deposit of the gospel is not a barren, educational exercise”¹⁰⁰ but rather is “deeply and inescapably relational. . . . This close relationship was a vehicle for one of the key elements of Paul’s training of Timothy—imitation. . . . It was not only the good deposit of the gospel that Paul passed on to Timothy, but a way of life.”¹⁰¹ This kind of imitation was only possible in the setting of deep relationship and fellowship between them. Consequently, believers today, to help each other grow as disciples, should diligently and intentionally cultivate brotherly relationships in loving fellowship with one another.

The Teachings and Practices of Reaching the Lost by Prior Saints

Historically, the church has embraced its Great Commission of reaching the lost. A genuine follower of Jesus Christ does what the Master has commissioned: “Go, therefore and make disciples” (Matt 18:29a). The early Christians were missional. They preached the gospel to the world around them, a task that was not always easy. Regardless of hardship and opposition, they were faithful in fulfilling what they were instructed to

⁹⁷ Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, 60.

⁹⁸ Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, 85.

⁹⁹ Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, 91.

¹⁰⁰ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Youngstown, OH: Mathias, 2009), 71.

¹⁰¹ Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 72.

do. Allison points out how the church is composed of ministers (disciples) that are “divinely called and divinely sent”¹⁰² to proclaim the gospel and advance the kingdom of God in this fallen world. Justin Martyr instructed Christians in the second century by connecting how a disciple of Christ reaches the lost in witnessing to nonbelievers with their visible fruits:

He [God] has exhorted us to lead all men, by patience and gentleness, from shame and the love of evil. And this indeed is proved in the case of many who once were of your way of thinking, but have changed their violent and tyrannical disposition, being overcome either by the constancy which they have witnessed in their neighbours’ lives, or by the extraordinary forbearance they have observed in their fellow-travellers when defrauded, or by the honesty of those with whom they have transacted business.¹⁰³

Justin Martyr also instructed second century Christians on the spiritual rewards that follow in leading disarray souls toward God: “If we persuade even a few, our gain will be very great; for, as good husbandmen, we shall receive the reward from the Master.”¹⁰⁴

Clement of Alexandria, in his treatise *Exhortation to the Heathen*, encouraged unbelievers of his day to abandon the “impious mysteries of idolatry for the adoration of the divine Word and God the Father,”¹⁰⁵ pointing them toward the great benefits “conferred on man through the advent of Christ”¹⁰⁶ and exhorting them to “abandon their old errors and listen to the instructions of Christ.”¹⁰⁷ It is also noted in Clement’s proclamation his sense of urgency and passion in the way he encourages others to follow Jesus: “Let us

¹⁰² Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church, Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 140.

¹⁰³ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, 168.

¹⁰⁴ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, 178.

¹⁰⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 2 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 171.

¹⁰⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, 202.

¹⁰⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, 205.

haste, let us run, my fellow-men—us, who are God-loving and God-like images of the Word. Let us haste, let us run, let us take His yoke, let us receive, to conduct us to immortality, the good charioteer of men. Let us love Christ.”¹⁰⁸

Ignatius of Antioch also gave instructions to the Christians of the second century, encouraging them to pray for the unbelievers and hoping for them to come to God in repentance:

Pray ye without ceasing in behalf of other men. For there is in them hope of repentance that they may attain to God. See, then, that they be instructed by your works, if in no other way. Be ye meek in response to their wrath, humble in opposition to their boasting: to their blasphemies return your prayers; in contrast to their error, be ye stedfast in the faith; and for their cruelty, manifest your gentleness. While we take care not to imitate their conduct, let us be found their brethren in all true kindness; and let us seek to be followers of the Lord.¹⁰⁹

Ulrich Zwingli, once proclaimed, “You are God’s tool. He wills to wear you out by use, not by idleness. Oh, happy man, whom He calls to His work.”¹¹⁰ Indeed, God is willing to use his disciples as tools in this corrupted world to bring the message of His gospel and through it save those that he has predestined by his sovereign and perfect will. Through the proclamation of the gospel humanity know the seriousness of their sinful state, and their hopelessness apart from Christ. As Martin Luther indicated, “When a man is humbled by the law, and brought to the knowledge of himself, then follows true repentance . . . and he sees himself to be so great a sinner that he can find no means how he may be delivered from his sin by his own strength, endeavor, and works.”¹¹¹

Many Puritans also contributed to the subject of disciple-making-disciples. Watson affirms that those that are of God “strives to be an instrument for making others

¹⁰⁸ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen*, 206.

¹⁰⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 53-54.

¹¹⁰ Elliot Ritzema, *300 Quotations for Preachers from the Reformation*, Pastorum Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2013), sec. “Ulrich Zwingli,” Logos.

¹¹¹ Ritzema, *300 Quotations for Preachers*, sec. “Martin Luther.”

godly,” and consequently they make an intentional effort for the conversion of souls, “he who loves his captain will persuade others to come under his banner.”¹¹² As Christians grow into being like Christ, their love for God and love for others also grows, which ignites in them a desire to make more disciples.

In light of the examples and teachings from prior saints encouraging believers to reach the lost with the gospel of Christ, the church today should also be committed to evangelism. Marshall and Payne explain the concept of the expository pulpit and the expository church, in which all believers should be involved in learning about Christ and teaching others about Him: “By their preaching, training and example, pastors equip every Christian to be a Christ-learner who helps others to learn Christ.”¹¹³ Indeed, every believer is expected to lovingly, intentionally, and diligently make more disciples. It is a task given by Christ to all his followers. They should practice it in every opportunity they find, and everywhere they are, “in every facet and activity of the transformative learning communities we call churches . . . in every corner of this present darkness.”¹¹⁴ Jonathan Dodson affirms, “Jesus calls each of us into making disciples. This isn’t a mission we stumble into. It requires intentionality. All Christians are sent to make disciples.”¹¹⁵

Self-Denial in Discipleship

Discipleship is costly. Steven Lawson asks, “What will it cost you to follow Christ?”¹¹⁶ to which he replies, “It will cost you showing to go your own way. It will require that you no longer live for yourself . . . it will cost you holding onto your self-

¹¹² Watson, *The Godly Man’s Picture*, 183.

¹¹³ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Vine Project, Shaping Your Ministry Culture around Disciple-Making* (Youngstown, OH: Mathias, 2016), 118.

¹¹⁴ Marshall and Payne, *The Vine Project*, 133.

¹¹⁵ Jonathan K. Dodson, *Gospel Centered Discipleship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 38.

¹¹⁶ Steven J. Lawson, *It Will Cost You Everything: What It Takes to Follow Jesus* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2021), 83.

righteousness. It will cost you cherishing your sin. . . . It will cost you the pursuit of the world.”¹¹⁷ Indeed, following Christ costs all these, and for many saints it has also cost their life, as they have preferred dying rather than denying their faith in Christ. Polycarp of Smyrna, a second-century believer who was burned at stake, told his killers prior to his death, “The proconsul’s fire lasts but a little while, the fires of judgment (‘reserved for the ungodly’) cannot be quenched.”¹¹⁸ Perpetua and Felicitas, third-century believers, preferred to die in the arena, suffering while being attacked by wild beasts, and then slain by the sword, rather than offering sacrifice to the emperor and denying Christ.¹¹⁹ Bishop Ignatius of Antioch, another believer from the second century, also suffered for Christ, and he proclaimed, “Now I begin to be a disciple. . . . Let fire and cross, flocks of beasts, broken bones, dismemberment . . . come upon me, so long as I attain to Jesus Christ.”¹²⁰ These prior saints, and many others, serve as examples to the church today on what it really means to follow Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains what denying himself in discipleship entails: self-denial “is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us . . . all that self-denial can say is: ‘He leads the way, keep close to him.’”¹²¹

Following Jesus is costly, but at the same time, as Lawson stated, those who committed their life to Jesus have gained far more than what they gave up: “You will lose your old life, but you will gain a new, abundant life. You will lose this world, but you

¹¹⁷ Lawson, *It Will Cost You Everything*, 83.

¹¹⁸ Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 361.

¹¹⁹ Galli and Olsen, *131 Christians*, 363.

¹²⁰ Galli and Olsen, *131 Christians*, 359.

¹²¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1959), 88.

will gain a far better world to come. You will lose the passing pleasures of sin, but you will gain far better joys in Christ.”¹²²

Conclusion

The way in which prior saints practiced discipleship serves as encouragement and example for contemporary Christians. Today’s believers should imitate the devotion and commitment for Jesus demonstrated by so many brothers and sisters of the past. Genuine followers of Christ faithfully practiced spiritual disciplines, grew in holiness toward obedience of Christ’s teachings and commands (motivated by love and gratitude to Jesus, whose perfect sacrifice and obedience brought salvation to those who trusted in him alone), developed fellowship with other believers for the purpose of equipping one another toward Christlikeness, and also desired to glorify Christ by sharing His gospel, His teachings, and His kingdom with the lost in the world. Faithfulness, dedication, and sacrifice for Jesus characterized so many genuine disciples of the past, an example that should be followed by today’s disciples.

¹²² Lawson, *It Will Cost You Everything*, 84.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter describes the implementation of the ministry project. Before proceeding with the implementation, I received all necessary approval from my faculty supervisor and the Ethics Research Committee of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The project implementation included promoting and administering the pre-project Discipleship Understanding and Practice Survey (DUPS),¹ teaching material development for preaching the discipleship sermon series,² preaching the material in Sunday's worship services at Grace Fellowship Church (GFC), administering the post-project DUPS,³ and analyzing the pre- project and post- project DUPS results for statistically significance. The implementation of the project began on June 20, 2022, and continued through October 2, 2022.

Promotion and Pre-Project Survey

Promotion for the project formally began among members of the congregation in the week prior to implementing the pre-project DUPS. This promotion was done through pulpit announcements in the Sunday worship services of Grace Fellowship Church, both in the A.M. English Worship Service and in the P.M. Spanish Worship Service.

Additionally, I had one-on-one conversations with many members of the congregation encouraging them to participate in the discipleship ministry project. One part that was emphasized during this promotion time was the necessity of volunteer participants to

¹ See appendix 1.

² See appendix 2.

³ See appendix 3.

attend all seven sermons that would be part of the curriculum. Many were enthusiastic and eager to participate in the study, and many committed to attend all seven sermons.

Week 1: Pre-Project DUPS

On June 26, 2022, the pre-project DUPS was administered. At the beginning of the morning worship service, during the announcements, the congregation was informed that after the service, the pre-project DUPS would be available for all voluntary participants. The DUPS required two conditions: (1) those who volunteered to participate must be repented, converted, and professed believers in Christ; and (2) those who volunteered to participate must be 18 years old or older. The “agreement to participate,” as stated in the survey, was read to the congregation. I also explained to the congregation the different sections of the survey: section 1 assessed discipleship understanding in the context of salvation (from questions 5 to 11 for a total of 7 questions); section 2 assessed the practice of spiritual discipline (from question 12 to 31 for a total of twenty questions); section 3 assessed obedience to the Word of God (from question 32 to 46 for a total of 15 questions); section 4 assessed fellowship within the people of God (from question 47 to 59 for a total of 13 questions); and finally, section 5 assessed disciple-making practices (from question 60 to 73 for a total of 14 questions). Participants were to rank their responses between strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), disagree somewhat (DS), agree somewhat (AS), agree (A) and strongly agree (SA). Each answer corresponded with a number ranging from 1 to 6 in the survey scoring scale for the purpose of data analysis.⁴

A total of 37 participants completed the pre-project DUPS. All 37 participants responded “yes” to the question “Are you a repented, converted, and professing believer/Christian?” and all answered “yes” to the question, “Are you an adult (18 years old or older)?”

⁴ For the purpose of data analysis, the scoring scale in the survey corresponded to numerical values, strongly disagree being 1, disagree being 2, disagree somewhat being 3, agree somewhat being 4, agree being 5 and strongly agree being 6.

Table 1 summarizes ages of participants and their time being believers. The majority were long-term Christians, with 65 percent of believers being with more than 20 years in their faith journey. The fact that many GFC members are mature believers is a great opportunity for discipleship, as they could invest in younger and less mature believers in the church.

Table 1. Ages ranges of participant and years being believers

Ages ranges of participants			
18-34 years	35-54 years	55-75 years	Older than 75
3	14	18	2
8.11%	37.84%	48.65%	5.41%
How long being believers			
1-5 years	6-10 years	11-20 years	More than 20 years
4	3	6	24
10.81%	8.11%	16.22%	64.86%

When comparing the five sections of the DUPS, it is interesting to notice that the questions with the highest score of all corresponded to section 1 (discipleship understanding in the context of salvation). This observation is consistent with a strong reformed church having members with a solid theological knowledge regarding biblical soteriological issues, as these doctrines are emphasized in the new member’s class and prior to a person becoming an active part of the congregation. Given this solid truthful soteriological knowledge, it was less likely for the church to interpret discipleship teachings in a legalistic manner, as GFC members know that salvation is only by the grace of God. Table 2 shows the highest pre-project items ranked, all within section 1 (assessing discipleship understanding in the context of salvation) of the survey.

The fact that items 7, 10, and, 8 were also among the highest ranked was encouraging. A majority of participants were aware that they are being conformed into the image of Christ because God saved them, understood what Jesus meant when He said His disciples will be known by their fruits, and believed God’s work of sanctification is active

in their life, averaging a score of 5.76 in item 7, 5.73 in item 10 and 5.70 in item 8 respectively. The high awareness among participants on how God is working in His people and transforming them into Christlikeness making them able to grow in sanctification and producing in them “both the will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13) would also facilitate the teachings of practical issues in discipleship.

Table 2. Highest items ranked in the pre-project DUPS

Section 1 Items	Number of Responses	Average
6. Salvation is a gift of God and cannot be earned by anything I do.	37	5.97
5. I am saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ alone.	37	5.92
7. Because God saved me, I am being conformed into the image of Christ.	37	5.76
10. I understand what Jesus meant when He said “by their fruits you will know them” in Matthew 7:20.	37	5.73
8. I believe that God’s work of sanctification is active in my life.	37	5.70

Regarding the practice of spiritual disciplines in the pre-project survey (section 2), GFC participants ranked lower in items 26, 15, 13 and 21, followed by items 27, 30, 14, 18 and 28. Spiritual disciplines that are significantly neglected among participants were fasting, memorization/meditation on Scripture, and quality prayer time. Table 3 reflects more in detail lower scores in the pre-project survey regarding spiritual disciplines, with scales listed in ascending order. The questions regarding spiritual disciplines in the survey confronted participants with areas in need of improvement, bringing conviction and the necessity of change in those specific disciplines that were being neglected. The first step in growing in deficient spiritual habits is the awareness that it needs to improve, something that was revealed in the pre-project survey. This information was helpful in the development of a curriculum that provokes change for the better.

Table 3. Lowest pre-project results regarding spiritual disciplines

Spiritual Disciplines Items	Number of Responses	Average
26. I have practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting in the last month.	37	2.38
15. In the last week I have memorized at least one verse from the Bible.	37	2.86
21. Every day I have a dedicated prayer time.	37	4.30
27. I have practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting at least once in the past.	37	4.38
30. I can explain biblical principles of fasting.	37	4.43
14. I meditate every day in a portion of Scripture.	37	4.49
18. I believe I have a good prayer life.	37	4.59
28. I have never practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting.	37	4.62

Items that ranked higher in the practice of spiritual disciplines were 19, 31, 16 and 20, as seen in table 4. Item 19 averaged 5.41, in which most participants indicated that they pray at least once a day, which is interesting since the acknowledgement of not having a good prayer life was among the lowest scored items in table 3. This disparity points toward a distinction regarding the quantity of prayer and the quality of prayer among participants. Most participants agreed that prayer, Scripture reading, and meditation are important disciplines to do concomitantly while fasting, which was also an interesting finding, as the survey also revealed that fasting scored the lowest among the spiritual disciplines assessed.

Table 4. Highest pre-project results regarding spiritual disciplines

Spiritual Disciplines Items	Number of Responses	Average
19. I pray every day at least once.	37	5.41
31. I believe that praying, reading the Bible, and meditating in Scripture are important disciplines to also practice when fasting.	37	5.38
16. I enjoy studying my Bible.	37	5.30
20. I pray every day twice or more time.	37	5.14
17. I feel confident in understanding what I read from my Bible.	37	5.11
25. I can explain biblical principles of prayer.	37	5.11
22. I regularly pray for the will of God to be accomplished in my life.	37	5
24. I pray asking God for the fruit of the Spirit in my life.	37	5

The third section assessed in the pre-project DUPS was obedience to God’s Word. Christ, in the Great Commission, instructed the apostles regarding “teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20b); consequently, an integral part of discipleship is pursuing obedience and equipping others to obey God. Items 40, 43, 42 and 35 were the lowest scored in this section, while items 41, 44, 33 and 39 were highest score as detailed in table 5. Among the lower ranked items in this section was having an accountability partner (item 43), as many participants did not consider it important to confess sins to one another, which is a discouraging finding in the survey as Scripture clearly support this practice (Jas 5:16). Among the higher ranked items in this section were familiarity with the Great Commandment (item 33, averaging 5.70). The acknowledgement that love for other believers was growing every day scored lower (item 35 averaging 5.03). Knowing this information was helpful for the development of the teaching material with the purpose of stimulating a desire to grow in love for one another, asking for this love to God in prayers, and practical ways of showing that love in discipleship.

Table 5. Lower and higher pre-project results regarding obedience

Items related to Obedience of God's Word	Number of Responses	Average
Lower average Items		
40. I am currently struggling with sins in my life.	37	1.89
43. I believe personal accountability (and confessing sins) to another Christian is important for my spiritual growth.	37	4.70
42. When I disobey God (when I sin), I immediately repent, and confess my sin and try to overcome it with the help of the Holy Spirit and God’s Word.	37	4.95
35. My love for other people (especially fellow believers) is also growing every day.	37	5.03
Higher average Items		
39. I believe God is glorified when I obey his commandments.	37	5.62
33. I am familiar with “The Great Commandment” as taught by our Lord Jesus.	37	5.70
44. I know that in Christ all my sins are forgiven.	37	5.76
41. I believe the Holy Spirit helps me in fighting sin.	37	5.78

The fourth section assessed in the pre-project DUPS was fellowship among believers with lower and higher average results summarized in table 6.

Table 6. Lower and higher pre-project results regarding fellowship among believers

Items related to fellowship among believers	Number of Participants	Average
Lower Average Items		
57. I do visit those I know are sick.	37	3.49
50. I regularly attend prayer meetings.	37	4.16
55. I regularly pray with other Christians.	37	4.27
59. I know the names of most people attending Sunday Services at GFC	37	4.27
Higher averaged Items		
51. I regularly participate in the Lord's Supper	37	5.19
54. I enjoy worshipping and praying with other believers.	37	5.24
47. I understand the importance of biblical fellowship.	37	5.51
48. I regularly attend church.	37	5.59

It is unfortunate and discouraging that among the lower items scored in this section was attendance to prayer meetings, reflected in item 50, averaging 4.16 among GFC participants. Also, among the lower scored items was visiting the sick (item 57, averaging 3.49), and non-familiarization with the names of other members of the congregation (item 59, averaging 4.27). The low score in item 59 can likely being explained in part by the fact that GFC is a bilingual congregation, with two services in different languages, and there is a need for more integration and fellowship with one another regardless of a language barrier. The identification of these deficits was useful in the development of teaching materials that focused on improvements, by encouraging brothers and sisters to grow in their fellowship with one another, in prayers, in visiting the sick, in getting to know one another in order to pray for one another by name and with specific needs in mind.

Understanding the importance of biblical fellowship (item 47, averaging 5.51), scored higher in this section, which was significant given the fact that fellowship practices,

per se, scored low. This pointed toward a conviction of the necessity to do better and that participants would welcome practical teachings to improve fellowship practices. Other items that ranked higher in this section were regular participation in the Lord’s Supper (item 51, averaging 5.19) and acknowledgement of joy in the instances in which participants prayed and worshipped with other believers (item 54, averaging 5.24).

The fifth and last section assessed in the pre-project DUPS was disciple-making practices among GFC participants, with lower and higher average results summarized in table 7.

Table 7. Lower and higher pre-project results regarding disciple-making practices

Items related to disciple-making practices	Number of Participants	Average
Lower averaged items		
62. I am currently discipling another believer	37	2.65
66. I use everyday activities as opportunities to help others grow in Christlikeness	37	4.16
67. I am growing in my knowledge of disciple making	37	4.30
65. I am capable of training others to be disciples	37	4.42
70. I look for opportunities in my daily life to share my faith	37	4.51
Higher averaged items		
72. My neighbors and co-workers know I am a Christian	37	5.19
61. I am aware of my responsibility of making more disciples.	37	5.43
60. I am familiar with “The Great Commission” as taught by our Lord Jesus	37	5.54
68. I am comfortable sharing my faith with unbelievers	37	5.54
73. All Christians are responsible to play a role in practicing The Great Commission	37	5.54

A significant majority of participants were not currently discipling another believer, as reflected in item 62 with the lowest score in this section, averaging 2.65. This result was another discouraging finding in the pre-project DUPS, reflecting the necessity of teaching regarding disciple-making practices. An important aspect of discipleship is having someone to help grow into Christlikeness, teaching others believers spiritual disciplines, fellowshiping with them, studying Scripture together, talking about God’s

commands, and confessing their sins to one another, among others. Growing in godliness and helping others grow in godliness is the main goal of discipleship. Participants also scored poorly on the search for opportunities to share their faith with unbelievers (item 70). Even though most participants scored poorly in disciple-making practices, they were aware of its importance and were willing and motivated to receive instruction and improve multiplication in discipleship, as seen in higher scores in items 70, 60, 68 and 73.

After analyzing the results of the pre-project DUPS, I proceeded to the development of the teaching material.

Material Development

Overall, the pre-project DUPS was informative in its five sections and helped in the sermon development to educate and equip the congregation in the practice of biblical discipleship. The next step was to dedicate time for the development of the material to teach the congregation. The main texts used for the sermon series were 1 Corinthians 11:1, Matthew 6:5-15, Luke 2:46-47, Matthew 6:16-18, John 15:8-12, Matthew 28:19-20, and Acts 2:42.

Weeks 2 to 7

I dedicated six weeks, with many prayers, studying, and researching, to the process of preparing seven sermons in discipleship, while taking into account how the main purpose of discipleship is growing into Christlikeness. In week 2 I prepared the first sermon based on 1 Corinthians 11:1; in week 3 I prepared sermons 2 and 3, based on Matthew 6:5-15 and Luke 2:46-47; in week 4 I prepared sermon 4; in week 5 I prepared sermon 5; in week 6 I prepared sermon 6; and in week 7 I prepared sermon 7, which was the last sermon of the discipleship series.

Four GFC elders evaluated the seven sermons and served as the expert panel. To evaluate the material, the elders utilized a curriculum evaluation rubric, each item of the rubric evaluated within a scale of 1 to 4 (1 being “insufficient,” 2 being “requires

attention,” 3 being “sufficient,” and 4 being “exemplary”).⁵ The rubric evaluated the sermons regarding clarity, faithfulness to biblical theology, relevancy in the principle of multiplication, practical application, sufficiency, and reproducibility.

After the four elders evaluated the curriculum, a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level. One elder considered that more material was needed to achieve thoroughness (item 7), one elder considered this item sufficient, and the remaining two elders considered item 7 exemplary. The fact that one elder considered that more material was needed in the curriculum I believe was because the subject of discipleship is very broad. Recognizing how broad the subject of discipleship is led to the agreement that addressing it will not only be a seven-week endeavor but will continue forward. We committed as elders to remain in our efforts to continue to achieve a discipleship culture in the congregation beyond this project implementation, as discipleship should be a lifelong and constant pursuance of the church. Table 8 shows the results of the four reviewers in the curriculum evaluation rubric.

Table 8. Curriculum evaluation results

Rubric Criteria	1	2	3	4
1. The material in the curriculum is clearly relevant in the issue of biblical discipleship.			1	3
2. The material in the curriculum is faithful to a theology that is biblical.				4
3. The material in the curriculum includes relevant information for Christian faith and personal development of a believer.				4
4. The material in the curriculum encourages the principle of multiplication in discipleship.			3	1
5. The points of the material clearly support the purpose laid out in the project and are easy to understand.			1	3
6. The material in the curriculum contains points of practical application.			1	3
7. The material in the curriculum is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of discipleship.		1	1	2
8. Overall, the curriculum is clear and could be re-taught by another person.				4

⁵ See appendix 4.

After the discipleship curriculum was developed and reviewed, I then proceeded to teach the material to the church.

Teaching the Material

Over the next weeks I preached the discipleship material in the context of Sundays services sermons.⁶ Grace Fellowship Church is a bilingual congregation with two services each Sunday, one in the morning at 10:00 a.m. for the English-speaking members, and another at 1:00 p.m. for the Spanish-speaking members. During the next seven weeks, I preached the sermons twice each Sunday, in English and Spanish services. The first sermon was an introductory sermon to the topic of discipleship, with relevant introductory topics. The next three sermons focused on discipleship related to spiritual disciplines—one sermon dedicated to the subject of prayer, another sermon dedicated to the topic of Bible intake, and another in the discipline of fasting. After the sermons on spiritual disciplines, the next three sermons focused on being disciples that pursue obedience to the commandments of Jesus, making more disciples in evangelism and finally, fellowship among believers in discipleship as believers encourage each other to grow in Christlikeness.

Week 8

The first sermon was preached during week 8, on Sunday, August 14, 2022. The title of this first introductory sermon was “Discipleship for Christlikeness,” with the main text based on 1 Corinthians 11:1. This sermon emphasized how through discipleship believers grow in Christlikeness and at the same time help, assist, and equip others in the same purpose. Christians are called to be imitators of Christ and equip others to also be imitators of Christ. The main points of the sermons were: discipleship is for the purpose of Christlikeness, discipleship in relation to salvation, ways in which we cannot imitate

⁶ See appendix 2 for transcripts of the sermons.

Christ, discipleship is costly, and a restored perfected image of God through discipleship for Christlikeness with final words of application.⁷

Week 9

The second sermon was preached during week 9, on Sunday, August 21, 2022. The title was “Christlikeness in the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer,” based on Matthew 6:5-15. This sermon emphasized imitating and obeying Christ in the way he prayed and equipping others to pray. What is important is not what believers want to pray, but what God wants believers to pray. The main points of the sermon was: Christ prayed constantly; Christ taught us to pray; and praying God’s Word in Jesus Name along with applications. The congregation was challenged to increase prayer frequency, asking God for a renewed desire to pray. The congregation was also challenged to pray together and to help each other in achieving more quality prayer. The congregation was also encouraged to improve attendance in corporate prayers meetings.

Week 10

The third sermon was preached during week 10, on Sunday, August 28, 2022. The title was “Christlikeness in Scripture Intake,” based on Luke 2:46-47. This sermon emphasized imitating Christ in the way he was devoted to Scripture reading, meditation, memorization, and application. The main points of the sermons were: our Lord Jesus Christ was a man of scriptural intake; reading, studying, meditating, and memorizing God’s Word; and being doers of the Word, not only readers and hearers, along with applications. The congregation was challenged to spend quality time studying Scripture daily, through a yearly Bible plan reading, and Scripture memorization. More mature members of the congregation were encouraged to help younger members in discipleship in their Bible readings. Many were enthusiastic about Scripture memorization as many pointed out how they had neglected this habit over the years.

⁷ Manuscripts for all seven sermons preached can be found in appendix 2.

Week 11

The fourth sermon was preached during week 11, on Sunday, September 4, 2022. The title was “Christlikeness in the Spiritual Discipline of Fasting,” based on Matthew 6:16-18. The main points of the sermons were: our Lord Jesus Christ did fast; Christ taught us to fast and expects us to do so; and fasting done with a biblical purpose, along with applications. As noted during the pre-project DUPS, fasting was the spiritual discipline that ranked lowest, and many participants expressed having never fasted. In light of these results, the congregation was challenged to fast one day a week for three weeks, if no medical contraindications existed. The congregation was encouraged to pray and to meditate in Scripture while fasting. The purpose set for the collective fasting was to ask God to help the church grow toward Christlikeness; salvation for unbelieving family members; and victory over sin/growing in obedience. After the sermon was preached, many in the congregation enthusiastically accepted the challenge and committed to fast.

Week 12

The fifth sermon was preached during week 12, on Sunday, September 11, 2022. The title was “Christlikeness in Spiritual-dependent Obedience,” based on John 15:8-12. The main points of the sermons were: only Christ obeyed perfectly; disciples grow in the fruit of obedience through abiding in Christ; and abiding in Christ’s love, along with applications. Disciples glorify God by practicing Holy Spirit-dependent obedience and reflecting His image by their fruit, while being conformed to the likeness of Jesus, and in that way demonstrating they are in Christ. Disciples also admonish one another, helping each other grow in obedience. The congregation was encouraged to examine their lives, identifying what they are doing that is not pleasing to God and then repenting and asking God to help them in their battles against sin. It was also emphasized that believer’s strength to obey and love God comes only from Him through abiding In Christ, in His Word, and through the Holy Spirit.

Week 13

The sixth sermon was preached during week 13, on Sunday, September 18, 2022. The title was “Christlikeness in Reaching the Lost in Evangelism,” based on Matthew 28:19-20. The main points of the sermons were: Christ came for an evangelistic mission; and the same mission was given to us in missional discipleship, followed by application. During this week I taught how to share the gospel with unbelievers. The congregation was encouraged to actively practice the Great Commission, both with words and with actions. I challenged them to reach one unbeliever that week, to pray for them, invite them to church, and follow up with them as able. Many in the church committed to this challenge that Sunday, both from the English and the Spanish service, recognizing that their personal evangelistic effort needed change for the better.

Week 14

The seventh sermon was preached during week 14, on Sunday, September 25, 2022. The title was “Persevering in Christlikeness and Fellowship,” based on Acts 2:42. As this was the last sermon of the series, a summary of all prior lessons was done. Afterwards I proceeded to teach the main points of the sermon of that day which were: persevere in Christlikeness in discipleship; persevere in loving fellowship in discipleship; and persevere in investing in one another in discipleship, along with final words of application. Believers were encouraged to love one another, instruct one another, serve one another, and continue discipling one another, with the purpose growing as disciples of Christ.

Post-Project Discipleship Survey

When the discipleship series teachings were completed, the next step was to obtain post-project DUPS⁸ to measure effectiveness and statistical significance following the teaching intervention. The post-project DUPS was identical to the pre-project DUPS,

⁸ See appendix 3.

with the addition of two sets questions requesting feedback regarding discipleship teachings received:

1. In what ways, if any, were these biblical discipleship teachings helpful to you? Do you intend to do any changes in the way you practice personal discipleship toward Christlikeness? Are you more motivated to practice the Great Commission intentionally? Please elaborate.
2. Is there anything else that you would have liked to be taught regarding discipleship that you think was not covered in this series? Please elaborate.

Week 15

The post-project DUPS was administered during the week of September 26 to October 2. Many returned the survey that week, but other participants returned it several weeks later, with last surveys received during the week of October 9 to October 16, 2022. A total of 25 participants completed the post-project DUPS. Of those 25 post-project participants, 18 participants were identified with corresponding matched pre-project surveys to compare based on their chosen personal identification (surveys were anonymous). Seven participants post-project surveys likely self-assigned an identification number that was different from the one they self-assigned in the pre-project survey (likely they forgot what they wrote in the pre-project survey even though it was emphasized to use the same number), and could not be used for comparison purposes. Several participants traveled during that summer, a few were sick, and others did not complete the seven-week teachings. Consequently, several participants who completed the pre-project DUPS did not complete the post-project DUPS. In summary, 18 post-project DUPS matched with correspondent pre-project DUPS and were able to be compared for statistically significant change.

When comparing the 18 pre-project DUPS with their corresponding post-project DUPS, it was encouraging to discover that there was a positive difference and a successful statistically significant change following the discipleship teachings in the life of those 18 GFC members who fully participated in the project. This positive significance is showed in table 9, in which the two-tailed p value ($2.26154E-18$) was smaller than 0.05.

Table 9. Participants pre and post DUPS *t*-test results

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Pre-project survey	Post-project survey
Mean	5.026570048	5.533011272
Variance	0.605356635	0.319201057
Observations	69	69
Pearson Correlation	0.910743574	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	68	
t Stat	-11.95289275	
P(T<=t) one-tail	1.13077E-18	
t Critical one-tail	1.667572281	
P(T<=t) two-tail	2.26154E-18	
t Critical two-tail	1.995468931	

Several participants provided positive feedback through responses to the post-project DUPS open-ended questions. Some of those responses and comments included the following:

1. These discipleship teachings “made me more aware of weak points in my discipleship. I am more motivated to practice The Great Commission. Teaching was very helpful, done well.”
2. “This study was an enormous blessing to my life. It was very easily understood and challenging just enough to really convict the church! I was especially encouraged by the memorizing Scripture teachings.”
3. “I have felt convicted about not practicing spiritual disciplines as faithfully as I would like. I would like to change that.”
4. “I am trying to increase my memorizations and point more people to Jesus.”
5. These discipleship teachings “is helping me a lot, now I am reading the Bible more, and I am practicing the great commission more.”
6. “These sermons have been very beneficial to my soul. Having the goal of ‘Christlikeness’ emphasized from the start helped focus my mind to that ultimate aim. Your encouragements and challenges to fast and evangelize were my walk toward home, thank you for dedicating those into this study. I am certain that I am not the only one who has benefitted from it!”

7. "I purpose to revive my fasting. I purpose to find someone to witness to each week."
8. "I have expanded on helping others reach their spiritual goals through discipleship. I intend on changing by having a defined order in the process of discipleship. Definitely motivated to practice great commission."

Conclusion

The three goals of this ministry project were successfully completed during the implementation period. First, the understanding and practice of biblical discipleship by GFC members was successfully assessed through the pre-project DUPS. A curriculum was developed, and the material was successfully taught to the congregation. When comparing the pre-project and post-project DUPS, there was a positive and statistically significant change in discipleship practices by the 18 participants of the project. There was a commitment by participants to continue growing in their pursuit of Christlikeness through discipleship, along with helping and investing in one another to continue growing together as disciples of Jesus.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter evaluates the ministry project, demonstrating that its intended purpose was fulfilled. I will assess the project's three goals and point out how they were met. Next, I will explore the ministry project's strengths and weakness and what I would do differently. Then, I will provide theological reflections regarding the project and lastly, I will provide my personal reflections and conclusion.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of Grace Fellowship Church in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, in the practice of biblical discipleship. Scripture clearly teaches how every member of the church has a mandate from Christ to be a disciple and make more disciples. Christ is the Lord and Master of those who place their faith in Him. A disciple follows the Master's example, in obedience and submission to Jesus's commandments, gradually and progressively becoming like Jesus. Additionally, a disciple invests in equipping others for Christlikeness. A disciple also announces the gospel to those who are lost in the world, in order to make more disciples.

This ministry project purpose was birthed out of a realization that the awareness and the culture of discipleship could be strengthened among the members of Grace Fellowship Church. I noticed that even though GFC has a solid theological knowledge, including about the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, the practice of discipleship was poor. In other words, there was a significant gap in regard to what is known versus what is practiced, a gap between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. This gap was

confirmed when the pre-project DUPS was administered to church members.¹ Most participants in the pre-project survey acknowledged their responsibility of discipling others, but a significant minority were actually in the practice of discipling others.² Most participants in the pre-project survey acknowledged their awareness regarding the importance of fellowship among believers, yet a minority were involved in fellowship activities, and in attending corporate prayer meetings.³ Most participants in the pre-project survey acknowledged that praying, fasting, and Scripture memorization were very important disciplines for their spiritual wellbeing, yet most reported a poor prayer life, not meditating or memorizing Scripture, and never practicing the discipline of fasting.⁴ These are a few examples of how the pre-project survey confirmed this gap between orthodoxy and orthopraxy, hence the necessity of this project for equipping the members of GFC in discipleship practices. The following section will evaluate how the ministry project's goals were successfully met to achieve the purpose.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

For the ministry project's purpose to be successful, three goals were developed.

Goal 1: Discipleship Understanding and Practice Assessment

The first goal of the ministry project was to assess the current understanding and practice of biblical discipleship by the members of GFC. Knowing the current state of discipleship practices was crucial to developing a curriculum to equip the church. The pre-project DUPS⁵ was developed and administered to voluntary participants. The survey

¹ See tables 5-7 in chap. 4 for statistics supporting this statement.

² See table 7 in chap. 4 for statistics supporting this statement.

³ See table 6 in chap. 4 for statistics supporting this statement.

⁴ See table 3 in chap. 4 for statistics supporting this statement.

⁵ See appendix 1.

contained five sections: (1) discipleship understanding in the context of salvation; (2) the practice of spiritual discipline; (3) obedience to the Word of God; (4) fellowship within the people of God; and (5) disciple-making practices in evangelism.

This goal was successfully met after more than fifteen adult members completed the pre-project DUPS. Fifteen was the minimal participants required, and a total of 37 GFC adult members completed the survey. The pre-project DUPS results were then analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the current discipleship knowledge and practices among GFC members. The pre-project surveys helped in the identification of areas with opportunity for improvements, and this information was crucial in the further steps of the ministry project, including curriculum development and its teaching.

Goal 2: Curriculum Development

Having done the assessment of the pre-project DUPS, the second goal of the ministry project was to develop a seven-session curriculum that teaches and equips the members of GFC in biblical discipleship. The analyzed data in the pre-project DUPS helped to determine the emphasis of the teaching program. A disciple follows and imitates the Master, and with that in mind, the curriculum material focused on teaching discipleship from the basis of Christlikeness, being disciples that imitate Christ's practices of spiritual disciplines, Christ's love for Scripture and obedience, Christ's love for His people, in fellowship, investing in them, and Christ's evangelistic efforts in reaching the lost through the sharing of His gospel.

This goal was measured by an expert panel consisting of four elders of GFC who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.⁶ After the expert panel evaluated the curriculum, a

⁶ See appendix 4.

minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level,⁷ consequently meeting the requirement for this goal to be successful.

Goal 3. Teaching the Curriculum to Increase the Practice of Discipleship

The third goal of the ministry project was to increase the understanding and practice of biblical discipleship among members of GFC through the curriculum. Seven sermons were preached to the congregation on Sunday services. It was a great blessing that by the grace of God I was able to preach each sermon twice each Sunday for seven weeks: to English-speaking members in the 10:00 a.m. service and to Spanish-speaking members in the 1:00 p.m. service.

After the teaching material was implemented, 18 participants of those who completed the pre-project DUPS also completed the post-project DUPS. Unfortunately, not all the participants that completed the pre-project DUPS also completed the post-project DUPS. Some traveled for several weeks, and some were sick, among other reasons that prevented all participants from attending the seven teachings required for completion of the post-DUPS. The 18 participants that completed both pre-project and post-project DUPS were compared.

The *t*-test displayed a positive difference in the comparison between the two surveys (*t* Stat = 11.95289275).⁸ The two-tailed *p* value (2.26154E-18) was smaller than 0.05, indicating a success in the ministry project. There was a positive and successful statistical difference following the discipleship teachings in the life of those 18 GFC participants. The third goal of this ministry project was successfully met.

⁷ See table 8 in chap. 4 for support of this statement.

⁸ The absolute value of the *t* stat is larger than the *t* critical one-tail value of 1.667572281 and the *t* critical two-tail value of 1.995468931; thus, the teaching intervention made a positive statistical difference among the participants. See table 9 in chap. 4.

Table 10 illustrates the most significant positive changes when comparing the 18 participants pre-project and post-project DUPS. My heart was filled with joy after comparing and evaluating in more detail the results of specific discipleship practices that showed significant improvement because of this ministry project implementation. Among the top increases were fasting, discipling other believers, Scripture memorization, prayer, Scripture reading, and meditation. Item 26 showed an increase of 84 percent, which was amazing (participants averaged 2.50 in the pre-project and increased to 4.61 in the post-project DUPS). Item 62 increased by 56 percent, which was very encouraging, indicating that participants started investing in discipling other believers. Item 15 increased by 52 percent, an indication that participants started memorizing Scripture.

Item 13 increased by 32 percent, and item 9 by 8 percent, these last two related to Scripture reading. Items related to prayer also showed significant improvements, with a 23 percent increase in item 21, a 17 percent increase in item 50, a 12 percent increase in item 55, a 12 percent increase in item 18, and a 11 percent increase in item 23. There were also items related to fellowship in discipleship that showed significant improvement, including item 59 with 19 percent increase, item 35 with 19 percent increase, item 58 with 12 percent increase, and item 57 with 8 percent increase. Table 10 shows more details.

Table 10. Most significant DUPS increases

Items	Pre-project survey (N=18)	Post-project survey (N=18)	Percent Increase
26. I have practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting in the last month	2.50	4.61	84.44%
62. I am currently discipling another believer	2.89	4.50	55.77%
15. In the last week I have memorized at least one verse from the Bible	2.44	3.72	52.27%
13. I am currently following a yearly Bible reading plan	3.17	4.17	31.58%
21. Every day I have a dedicated prayer time	4.50	5.56	23.46%
67. I am growing in my knowledge of disciple-making	4.67	5.56	19.05%
59. I know the names of most people attending Sunday Services at GFC	4.44	5.28	18.75%
38. I regularly ask God in my prayers to help me grow into obedience to His law	4.78	5.61	17.44%
50. I regularly attend prayer meetings	4.67	5.44	16.67%
52. I have an accountability brother or sister that I can talk to regarding spiritual issues	4.72	5.50	16.47%
35. My love for other people (especially fellow believers) is growing every day	5.11	5.83	14.13%
66. I use everyday activities as opportunities to help others grow in Christlikeness	4.83	5.50	13.79%
70. I look for opportunities in my daily life to share my faith	4.83	5.50	13.79%
55. I regularly pray with other Christians	4.94	5.56	12.36%
58. I am intentional in developing fellowship with other Christians	5.06	5.67	12.09%
18. I believe I have a good prayer life	4.72	5.28	11.76%
14. I meditate every day in a portion of Scripture	4.78	5.33	11.63%
23. I regularly pray for God to help me obey His commandments	4.94	5.50	11.24%
34. My love for God is growing every day	5.11	5.67	10.87%
71. I pray regularly for the unbelievers	4.94	5.39	8.99%
29. I believe fasting is a necessary spiritual discipline	5.00	5.44	8.89%
12. I read my Bible every day	5.06	5.50	8.79%
57. I do visit those I know are sick	3.94	4.28	8.45%

In summary, the three goals of the project were successfully met: the understanding and practice of biblical discipleship by the members of GFC was assessed through the pre-project DUPS, a seven-session curriculum was developed, and the

congregation was equipped in biblical discipleship through the teaching of the curriculum.

Strengths of the Project

Several strengths characterized this ministry project. The first strength is its Christocentric emphasis. This strength can be evidenced on how the project directly connects discipleship with Christlikeness. There is no discipleship without Christ, and everything that is practiced in discipleship should be done under the premise of resemblance of Christ. A disciple of Christ longs for growth in spiritual disciplines, in obedience, in fellowship with other believers, and in sharing the gospel, all because of his love for Christ and a sincere desire as a believer to be like the Master.

A second strength of this project was its scriptural faithfulness. Each of the teachings were rich in scriptural references supporting every point, as I tried to equip the members in biblical discipleship. The fundamental value of the authority of Scripture in every aspect of the church is something that can never be neglected.

A third strength of this project was its participants. I am blessed to be one of the elders of a theologically sound church. The majority of GFC members are long-term Christians, with a large percentage of the participants (65 percent) being believers for more than twenty years.⁹ The solid orthodoxy of participants made the teachings more digestible, allowing the project to be focused in encouraging orthopraxy in discipleship.

Another strength was a great enthusiasm among participants, with obvious desire to improve in their discipleship practices as the lessons were applied. This enthusiasm later expanded beyond participants, to many that did not participate in the surveys. There was a revival to be better disciples. Many members started to fast and to pray more with one another, especially many that are Spanish speaking members of the church. People who never fasted before, started doing this practice with joy. Many were

⁹ See table 1 in chap. 4 for support of this statement.

also encouraged and more motivated to memorize Scripture. Many started inviting unbelievers to the congregation with more consistency. This enthusiasm was a positive aspect of this ministry project.

Weaknesses of the Project

The first weakness was the number of participants completing the surveys. Even though the whole congregation benefitted spiritually with the discipleship series preached during the implementation on Sundays, it would have been better if more members would have committed to the project by filling out the surveys. Eighteen members completed both the pre-project and post-project DUPS, which exceeded the minimum required, however, more participants would have made the ministry project stronger. Still, I am thankful that the whole church benefitted from the project implementation through its preaching for everyone in Sunday services.

A second weakness was that the subject of discipleship is broad. I tried to include in seven weeks all the material I considered most fundamental in relation to being a disciple and making disciples. There is always more that can be taught about discipleship, and there was a potential to include more practical issues. Even though this was a weakness, at the same time it was also a strength, as it led to the acknowledgement that the pursuit of a discipleship culture is a lifelong task that needs to be continued in the life of the church.

What I Would Do Differently

If I were to complete this project again, a possible modification would be to give more than one week for the pre-DUPS to be completed so more members could have participated, and then I would have been able to measure even more findings after the teachings. For example, I could have allowed the survey to be filled for three consecutive Sundays instead of one, then more people would have been part of the project.

Another issue I would have done differently is rethinking the DUPS. The survey included 73 questions, and after seeing how long it took for people to fill it out, it appears it was too long, especially for many elderly brothers and sisters in the congregation, which were the majority, that had to take significant time in completing the surveys. Also, because of the length of the survey, few took it home and did not return it. More people would have returned it if the survey had been shorter. In addition, I would have made the printing size of the letters in the survey significantly larger, as I noticed that some with vision acuity issues had difficulty reading the items in the survey.

Theological Reflections

The most important theological insight I have gained in this project is how discipleship is completely Christ-dependent, as it is only possible through abiding in Christ. Legalism does not have any part in biblical discipleship because obedience to Christ, and the imitation of Him, should be practiced out of love for Jesus. Biblical discipleship is not possible without abiding in Christ and His love. John 15:4-5 clearly reflects this reality, as Jesus told His followers: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” A believer would not be able to pray like Jesus, fast like Jesus, love others like Jesus, or reach the lost with the gospel unless he/she abides in Christ. Only through abiding in Christ can disciples reflect the teachings and examples of Jesus in their life. As a disciple abides in Christ, he is also being transformed by Christ. As disciples abide, follow, reflect, and imitate Christ, they are also transformed toward adopting the mind of Christ and the actions of Christ: “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16; Phil 2:5).

There is a fine line between legalism and discipleship. During the sermons I wanted to avoid the teachings to be taken in a legalistic manner, something that by the grace of God I was able to achieve. At the same time, an emphasis on the relation between

discipleship and obedience cannot be neglected. Disciples are called to observe all the commandments of Jesus (Matt 28:20), in total submission to God's will, with commitment to Him, and making every effort to live a life for Jesus, like Jesus, and through Jesus.

Finally, it is important to point out that disciples are meant to be part of a community of believers in a local church, investing in one another, supporting one another, and encouraging one another in their faith, for the purpose of sanctification and Christlikeness.

Personal Reflections

It has been a long journey. As I personally reflect on how I have been able to reach this point, only one thought comes to my mind: this is all by the grace of God. This is the only explanation on how far God has taken me in studying His Word, and I know that much lies ahead, as Scripture is an unending fountain of food for the soul. By the grace of God, I will continue growing in Him. As I write these last words in this ministry project, I do it with gratitude toward God. It is only possible because of you, Lord. I have learned a lot while working in this ministry project. I have been the one more blessed by it. God is making me a better disciple. He confronted me with flaws and failures in my spiritual life and is making me a better follower of Christ. I am committed to continue growing in being like my Master. By the grace of God, I will continue growing in the practice of spiritual disciplines (prayer, Scripture intake, meditation, memorization, fasting with purpose). I will continue to grow in obedience through abiding in Christ's love, I will continue growing in fellowship with others Christ followers, and I will continue sharing the gospel with those in the world who needs salvation through Christ alone. I will continue growing as an elder/pastor, serving God's people with love and enthusiasm. I will continue growing as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Thank You, God. Your grace is always enough.

Conclusion

During this final chapter, the ministry project was analyzed and evaluated. The members of Grace Fellowship Church were equipped in the practice of biblical discipleship. This was clearly evidenced by significant improvements in the post-project DUPS. The discipleship culture in the church has significantly improved after the implementation of this project. The elders of the church are committed to continue growing a culture of discipleship at GFC. Growing as a disciple of Christ is a joyful, Spirit-dependent lifelong endeavor.

APPENDIX 1

PRE-PROJECT DISCIPLESHIP UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE SURVEY (DUPS)

The following survey was used to provide a picture of the strengths and weaknesses of discipleship knowledge and practice among congregants of GFC. This survey was administered prior to the implementation of the project in the congregation.

PRE-PROJECT DISCIPLESHIP UNDERSTANDING
AND PRACTICE SURVEY (DUPS)

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practice of biblical discipleship by members of Grace Fellowship Church. This research is being conducted by Dionardo Medina for the purpose of completing a ministry project. In this research, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your personal and public discipleship practices and understanding as a follower of Jesus Christ. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Discipleship is “the process of learning the teachings of Jesus and following after his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹ In addition, discipleship involves the process of making other disciples through teaching and evangelism. The aim of discipleship is Christlikeness, which is the final goal of eternal election, “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29).

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

1. Are you a repented, converted, and a professing believer/Christian? Yes ___ No ___
2. Are you an adult (18 years old or older)? Yes ___ No ___
3. How old are you?
Between 18 to 34 years old _____
Between 35-54 years old _____
Between 55-75 years old _____
More than 75 years old _____
4. How long have you been a believer?
1 to 5 years _____
6- to 10 years _____
11 to 20 years _____
More than 20 years _____

¹ Chris Byrley, “Discipleship,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), Logos.

**Section 1. Discipleship Understanding
in the Context of Salvation**

- SD - Strongly Disagree
- D - Disagree
- DS - Disagree Somewhat
- AS - Agree Somewhat
- A - Agree
- SA - Strongly Agree

- 5. I am saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ alone.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 6. Salvation is a gift of God and cannot be earned by anything I do.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 7. Because God saved me, I am being conformed into the image of Christ.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 8. I believe that God’s work of sanctification is active in my life.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 9. Since the day God saved me, I have been growing in holiness, obedience, and mortifying sin.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 10. I understand what Jesus meant when he said “by their fruits you will know them” in Matthew 7:20.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 11. I believe God is producing fruits of salvation in me.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

**Section 2. The Practice of
Spiritual Disciplines**

- 12. I read my Bible every day.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 13. I am currently following a yearly Bible reading plan.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 14. I meditate every day in a portion of Scripture.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 15. In the last week I have memorized at least one verse from Bible.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 16. I enjoy studying my Bible.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 17. I feel confident in understanding what I read from my Bible.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

18. I believe I have a good prayer life.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
19. I pray every day at least once.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
20. I pray every day twice or more times.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
21. Every day I have a dedicated prayer time.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
22. I regularly pray for the will of God to be accomplished in my life.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
23. I regularly pray for God to help me obey His commandments.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
24. I pray asking God for the fruit of the Spirit in my life.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
25. I can explain biblical principles of prayer.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
26. I have practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting in the last month.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
27. I have practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting at least once in the past.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
28. I have never practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
29. I believe fasting is a necessary spiritual discipline.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
30. I can explain biblical principles of fasting.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
31. I believe that praying, reading the Bible, and meditating in Scripture are important disciplines to also practice when fasting.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

Section 3. Obedience to the Word of God

32. I strive to live in obedience to the commandments and moral principles taught by Jesus.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
33. I am familiar with “The Great Commandment” as taught by our Lord Jesus.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
34. My love for God is growing every day.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

35. My love for other people (especially fellow believers) is also growing every day.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
36. I welcome constructive criticism (correction) from fellow believers.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
37. I read the Bible with the purpose of knowing and obeying the commands of God (applying it in my life).
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
38. I regularly ask God in my prayers to help me grow into obedience to His law.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
39. I believe God is glorified when I obey his commandments.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
40. I am currently struggling with sins in my life.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
41. I believe the Holy Spirit helps me in fighting sin.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
42. When I disobey God (when I sin), I immediately repent, and confess my sin and try to overcome it with the help of the Holy Spirit and God' Word.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
43. I believe personal accountability (and confessing sins) to another Christian is important for my spiritual growth.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
44. I know that in Christ all my sins are forgiven.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
45. When I sin against a person I usually ask for forgiveness to that person, with a sincere heart, looking for correction/reconciliation.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
46. When others sins against me, I strive to forgive them.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

Section 4. Fellowship with the People of God

47. I understand the importance of biblical fellowship.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
48. I regularly attend church.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
49. I regularly attend Sunday school.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
50. I regularly attend prayer meetings.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

51. I regularly participate in the Lord's Supper.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
52. I have an accountability Christian brother or sister that I can talk to regarding spiritual issues.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
53. I seek advice from other Christians regarding spiritual issues I am struggling with.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
54. I enjoy worshiping and praying with other believers.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
55. I regularly pray with other Christians.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
56. I desire to visit those I know are sick.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
57. I do visit those I know are sick.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
58. I am intentional in developing fellowship with other Christian believers.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
59. I know the names of most people attending Sunday Services at Grace Fellowship Church.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

Section 5. Disciple-Making Practice

60. I am familiar with "The Great Commission" as taught by our Lord Jesus.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
61. I am aware of my responsibility of making more disciples.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
62. I am currently discipling another believer.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
63. I have or had a person in my life who disciplined me.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
64. I desire to make disciples.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
65. I am capable of training others to be disciples.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
66. I use everyday activities as opportunities to help others grow in Christlikeness.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
67. I am growing in my knowledge of disciple-making.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

68. I am comfortable sharing my faith with unbelievers.
 SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
69. I know how to share my testimony.
 SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
70. I look for opportunities in my daily life to share my faith.
 SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
71. I pray regularly for the unbelievers.
 SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
72. My neighbors and co-workers know I am a Christian.
 SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
73. All Christians are responsible to play a role in practicing The Great Commission.
 SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

Personal Identification #: _____
 (Please use this the same number when survey repeated at the end of the sermon series).

Gender: Male _____ Female _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX 2
SERMON TRANSCRIPTS

This appendix include the transcripts of the material preached to the congregation of GFC during the implementation of the ministry project.

Sermon 1

Dionardo Medina

Series: Biblical Discipleship

Title: Discipleship for Christlikeness.

Main Text: 1st Corinthians 11:1

Place: Grace Fellowship Church, Hazleton, PA

Date: Sunday - 08/14/2022. AM Worship Service

Please open your Bibles if you kindly will and let's read together from **1st Corinthians 11:1**. Here, the apostle Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, and told them the following:

1 Corinthians 11:1 **“Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”** Again, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

Let's please pray together: Dear heavenly Father...

Introduction

Dear brothers and sisters, today we are starting a seven-week teaching series regarding Biblical Discipleship. The practice of discipleship is crucial, especially as we grow and mature in our Christian life. Why is it crucial? Why is discipleship important? Because of its purpose, which is Christlikeness. discipleship for the purpose of Christlikeness.

What is Discipleship? Discipleship is “the process of learning the teachings of Jesus and following after his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹ In addition, discipleship involves the process of making other disciples through teaching and evangelism. The aim of discipleship is Christlikeness, which is the final goal of eternal election, “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29).

As we start these series today, there are few pertinent points we need to make sure we understand well regarding the subject of discipleship.

First, as we have indicated, discipleship is done for the purpose of Christlikeness.

Second, discipleship in relation with salvation.

Third, ways in which we cannot imitate Christ.

Forth, discipleship is costly.

And last, the restored perfected image of God through discipleship for Christlikeness.

Point #1. Discipleship for the Purpose of Christlikeness.

God's purpose for those he has chosen for his glory is to be conformed to the image of Christ. A very important component of the believers' experience of salvation is growing

¹ Chris Byrley, “Discipleship,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), Logos.

into Christian maturity. **Romans 8:28** says “²⁸ **And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**” The next verses tell us what is God purpose for us, verse 29-30 of Romans chapter 8 says “²⁹ **For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son [CHRISTLIKENESS], in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.** ³⁰ **And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.**”

So discipleship is the process of us individually growing into imitating Christ, CHRISTLIKENESS, and then helping others to do the same.

Those that truly are IN CHRIST will grow into being LIKE CHRIST. Those that belongs to God do not long for the things of this world, but instead replicate the character of Christ in their life and equip others for the same purpose. In other words, someone who IS a disciple, will also DO and PRACTICE what his Master did, and also will assist others to grow in being like his Master. **Romans 12:2** “**Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**”

Those that God saved are predestined to be conformed into the image of His Son, consequently God’s will and desire for his children, for us, is that we grow into being like Christ, into IMITATING Christ. Discipleship entails equipping each other in the process of growing in Christlikeness. The apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthians to imitate him the same way he imitated Christ (1 Cor 11:1). Encouraging each other to imitate Jesus should be a constant practice among the members of every local church. As Christ’ disciples, those truly saved by the grace of God do glorify Him by the joyful and diligent pursuit of being conformed into the image of Christ, imitating his way of life, imitating how he practiced spiritual disciplines (like for example prayer, fasting, Bible intake and others spiritual disciplines), imitating also how He delighted in obeying the father, and by doing everything we can to replicate this in other believers, in prayerful dependency of the Holy Spirit. **Ephesians 4:12-16** says how we should be equipping one another, “¹² **to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,** ¹³ **until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,** ¹⁴ **so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes.** ¹⁵ **Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,** ¹⁶ **from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.”**

Maturity, holiness, sanctification, Christlikeness, all of these things are the main goal of discipleship. Sanctification is both, and at the same time, positional and progressive. It is positional in the sense that those chosen by God are already declared saints “in Christ” through The Lord Jesus perfect obedience and substitutionary/redemptive sacrifice. The progressive aspect of sanctification applies to believers in the context of their fallen nature in this corrupted world, while awaiting glorification, and in this sense, progressive sanctification is a cooperative work of God and man (also known as a synergistic process). God set believers apart from sin, providing the example of Jesus Christ’s

obedience, and supplying the power and resources of the Holy Spirit to lead Christians into deepening maturity and holiness. It is impossible to grow into Christlikeness without the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Disciples then are responsible for putting into practice the tools of sanctification (also known as means of grace) that God gives them to achieve their role in their progression toward Christian maturity and Christlikeness. These means of grace include, but are not limited to prayer, reading and meditating on Scripture, fasting, the mortification of the flesh (which is putting sin to death), confession of sin, and others. All of these in the context of imitating Christ as the Master. It is also important to point out how complete human sinlessness or perfection in the Christian life is not possible in our current fallen nature. Believers grow in holiness, but perfection is not attainable in this world, only Christ was perfect, and that's why only by faith in the God-Man Christ and His perfect obedience we are saved. Christ did what none of us are able to do, obey perfectly. Christ was perfect in all things and at the same time, and every act of his obedience was substitutionary (he did it for us) in order to fulfill the law on behalf of his chosen people (who were incapable of doing so). Disciples are called to imitate Christ's character and obedience, but only through Christ's substitution (he alone is the perfect one) disciples can engage in imitation. Only in Christ alone, by Christ's power alone, for the glory of God alone, disciples can grow in imitating His character.

My goal and my sincere prayer is that by the end of these series we be more determined to imitate Jesus. That we be more conscious of the reality that being a disciple of Jesus implies growing into being more like Him. That we diligently strive and make every effort for more Christlikeness in our lives. Christ said in **Luke 6:40** **"A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher."** My goal and sincere prayer is that by the end of these series we grow into praying more like Jesus, both personally and corporately in the church, that we have a greater passion for reading and studying Scripture deeply, that we start to incorporate a little bit more the discipline of fasting in our personal devotions, that we confront and hate our sins more (no matter what sin it might be, all of us struggle with specific sins), but my prayer is that we mortify more and more the sins that we struggle with, growing in obedience to the commandments of Christ. My goal and prayer is also that by the end of this series we are more intentional in our Christ-centered relationship with one another, and finally that we share the Good News of the Gospel more frequently with the lost souls that are around us.

Point #2. Discipleship in Relation with Salvation

It is also necessary to mention few clarifications and considerations related to the issue for discipleship. The **First one** is something that I think all of you here at Grace Fellowship Church already know. We should never make the mistake of believing that we grow in imitating Christ in order to earn salvation. Absolutely NOT. Salvation is a gift of God. We don't pray more for the purpose of deserving, earning, or gaining salvation. We don't fast more, or read/study Scripture more, or obey the commandments of God more, or evangelize to the lost more FOR THE PURPOSE of deserving, earning or gaining salvation. INSTEAD those who are already saved have the desire to grow in Christlikeness, have the desire to imitate Christ, all BECAUSE of the fact that God have already worked in their life in order to desire the things of God. We disciples want to be like Christ, because of the work that God has already done in us. In **Jeremiah 31:33b** the

Lord says “...I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” And in Ezequiel 36:26-28 the Lord says “²⁶And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” You see brothers and sisters, it is God who does it, “I will put, I will write, I will give you, I will remove, I will put my Spirit in you,” says the Lord. It is God’s work for God’s glory. Even our efforts to grow in Christlikeness is the result of the work that the Holy SPIRIT has already done in us, ALL THE GLORY BELONGS TO GOD. He saved us, and he is also the one working in our sanctification to make us more like JESUS.

The God who saves is also the God who sanctifies, as the Holy Spirit produces growth into maturity and Christlikeness in His people, as 1 Corinthians 6:11b says “...you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

What we DO (good works) is the result of what we ARE in Christ. Works does not produce salvation. Works are the result of receiving the unmerited gift of salvation from God. Scripture says in Titus 3:5-7, “**he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**” Unfortunately, many throughout church history, including in our contemporary times, have made the mistake of perceiving discipleship teachings in a legalistic manner, this is a terrible mistake. Discipleship is not legalism; we do not obey to be saved. Again, our salvation is by grace alone. We read in Ephesians 2:8-10: “**For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.**” Brother and sisters, salvation is by *grace for the purpose of good works for God’s glory*. By grace alone, through faith alone, IN CHRIST alone, for the glory of God alone. Psalm 3:8 clearly states that “**Salvation belongs to the Lord; your blessing be on your people!**”

J. T. English indicates: “The New Testament gives us the paradoxical picture that the Christian life is entirely of grace but that we are also called to grow in that grace... Grace creates growth. Those who have received the grace of Christ also want to grow in Christ.”² Rather than obeying and growing in a legalistic manner, genuine disciples practice what Jesus commanded them out of love for God and others. Mark 12:30-31 says: “**And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.**” Only after being recipients of the gospel by grace from God, in new birth and regeneration, then “the reception of the gospel creates a desire in disciples to grow in the

² J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2020), 137.

gospel,”³ consequently resulting in Christians who strain forward in pursuing maturity, training themselves for godliness (1 Tim. 4:7), holiness and Christlikeness.

Point #3. Ways in which we cannot Imitate Christ

Another clarification pertinent to address as we start today this seven-weeks biblical discipleship series is that there are ways we cannot be like Christ, like for example we cannot be like Christ in His PERFECT obedience, OR in His Substitutionary atonement/sacrifice, OR in His deity attributes (omnipotent/all powerful, infinite, omnipresent, Sovereign and others) – because of the fact that Christ is God and we are not, and there are attributes that are Non-Communicable, that only GOD has. Disciples cannot imitate these things of course, instead we are called into being like Him in his character and obedience, in developing fruits of the Spirit. Perfect obedience only belongs to Christ, that’s why salvation is by faith in Christ along who obeyed perfectly for us. At the same time, we as disciples of Christ also grow in obedience, until one day in which we will be glorified and unable to sin no more. While in this life on earth, the Holy Spirit works in us, sanctifying us by His power, and enabling us to imitate Jesus. Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote in Colossians 1:9-14 **“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹ being strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹² giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”** Brothers and sisters, it is God, and God alone, who QUALIFIES us to grow in imitating Jesus in his character and fruits. Peter wrote to Christians in the first Century, in **1st Peter 2:1**, telling them that they were elected and consequently saved **“according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood...”**

Point #4. Discipleship is Costly

Another pertinent point regarding these series is being aware of the fact that it is not easy to follow and imitate Jesus. The world is against it, the devil is against it, our own flesh is against it. Brothers and sisters, Discipleship is costly. Jesus told his disciples in **Matthew 16:24** **“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”** In order to follow Christ, in order to be a disciple of Christ, we need to deny ourselves. Christlikeness requires self-denial. Steven Lawson in one of his writings asked: “What will it cost you to follow Christ?” to which he replied, “It will cost you showing to go your own way. It will require that you no longer live for yourself... it will cost you holding onto your self-righteousness. It will cost you cherishing your sin... It

³ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 138.

will cost you the pursuit of the world.”⁴ Indeed, following Christ costs all these, and for many saints, it has also cost their life, as they have preferred dying rather than denying their faith in Christ. Polycarp of Smyrna, a second century believer, who was burned at the stake, told his killers prior to his death “the proconsul’s fire lasts but a little while, the fires of judgment (“reserved for the ungodly”) cannot be quenched.”⁵ Perpetua and Felicitas, third century believers, preferred to die in the arena, suffering while being attacked by wild beasts, and then slain by the sword, rather than offering sacrifices to the emperor and denying Christ. Bishop Ignatius of Antioch, another believer from the second century, also suffered for Christ, and he proclaimed “Now I begin to be a disciple.... Let fire and cross, flocks of beasts, broken bones, dismemberment ... come upon me, so long as I attain to Jesus Christ.”⁶ This is just a few examples of genuine disciples that had denied themselves and when necessary given their life for the sake of Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer explained what denying himself in discipleship entails. He wrote that self-denial “is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us... all that self-denial can say is: ‘He leads the way, keep close to him.’”⁷ The apostle Paul wrote in **Philippians 3:8** **“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”** Faithfulness, dedication, and sacrifice for Jesus characterized so many genuine disciples of the past. Those who follow Christ today should imitate them, we need to do the same. For those who really follow Jesus, Jesus Christ is the greatest treasure of all. There is nothing greater in this world, there is nothing greater in the universe that could be compared with the privilege, and the joy of having Christ as our Lord and Master, and following him with all we have. With giving all for Jesus, if necessary, as long as we have Christ, we are OK. What a terrible position to be in if a person has everything in this world, but is not united with Christ. Being a genuine disciple of Jesus is costly, following Jesus is costly, but at the same time, as Lawson stated, those who committed their life to Jesus have gained far more than what they gave up, “you will lose your old life, but you will gain a new, abundant life. You will lose this world, but you will gain a far better world to come. You will lose the passing pleasures of sin, but you will gain far better joys in Christ.”⁸

⁴ Steven J. Lawson, *It Will Cost You Everything: What It Takes to Follow Jesus* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2021), 83.

⁵ Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 361.

⁶ Galli and Olsen, *131 Christians*, 359.

⁷ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1959), 88.

⁸ Lawson, *It Will Cost You Everything*, 84.

Point #5. The Restored Perfected Image of God Through Discipleship for Christlikeness

This is the last point I want to talk to you about today. Christlikeness to restore a perfected God's image in us. Brothers and sisters, the more we reflect the image of God, the image of Christ, the more we imitate Christ, then we indeed exalt and glorify God in our lives, as the purpose for which He created us is restored in us IN CHRIST. We were created in God's image. **Genesis 1:27 "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."** Hokeman points out that, "the concept of man as the image or likeness of God tells us that man as he was created was to mirror God and to represent God."⁹ By mirroring God, humans being were created to reflect God's love, kindness, and goodness. The concept of "in God's image" also implies to the fact that men were made to represent God, stewarding His creation and advancing His kingdom as His ambassadors on earth. Hokeman outlines four stages in the doctrine of the image of God: "prior to the fall, the original image; after the fall, the perverted image; through the redemption [IN CHRIST], the renewed or restored image; and in the future, with glorification, the perfected image."¹⁰ The fall in the Garden of Eden corrupted the image of God in humanity. The current stage of the believers in the church is redemption, as believers are being renewed and restored toward the likeness of Jesus. Believers are saved, justified, sanctified in Christ and at the same time they are growing in sanctification here on earth through the power of the Holy Spirit. Christians are holy in Christ, justified, but also at times continue to struggle with sin until the time of glorification. As we help each other, as we equip each other to grow into Christlikeness, we are doing this for the Glory of God. Discipleship in community life, both inside and outside the church, must be done with the purpose of advancing into the restoration of the proper image of God in the life of each other. This restoration of being in the image of God is only possible in Jesus Christ, and by knowing him more, by imitating him, by growing into Christlikeness, the church goes back into showing more love, kindness, and goodness to one another. So, in this regard, community life and discipleship ought to be Christocentric, in practice and purpose. From looking at Jesus Christ, the perfect image of God, we learn that the proper functioning of the image of God includes love that is directed toward God, and toward neighbor.

Conclusion and Final Words of Application

- Brothers and sisters, genuine saving faith in Christ leads to imitating Christ. We embrace imitating Christ based on our Faith in Christ alone for our salvation, not on any work we with might do. Anything Christ-like that we do, it is done because of our faith in him, through God's power and for the Glory of God.
- In the next few weeks, we will be exploring ways in which we imitate Jesus and follow after his example; and how we need to be helping one another to grow into Christlikeness. What we are going to be dealing with in the next few weeks are very practical issues, if we do not practice imitating Jesus, we are not growing

⁹ Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 339.

¹⁰ Allison, *Historical Theology*, 339.

into being a disciple of Jesus. This is what God wants of us: “to be conformed into the image of Christ”

1 Corinthians 11:1: “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ”

1 Corinthians 4:16 “I urge you, then, be imitators of me.”

Ephesians 5:1: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.”

- We first are called to be disciples in order to make disciples. Discipleship is about growing into being like Christ, and encouraging and equipping others to also be like Christ. We need first to imitate Christ in order to be able to equip others to do the same. In other words, we need to practice what we preach. Discipleship implies FIRST being a disciple in faith and practice and THEN teach and equip others to do the same.
- Being a disciple is not a passive matter: It requires our effort. We read in **2 Peter 2:5** “...**make every effort** to supplement your faith with virtue.” Brothers and sister “make every effort”. Again Christ told his disciples in **Luke 13:24 (NIV)** “**Make every effort** to enter through the narrow door.” Make every effort, that is what you and me need to be doing in the process of growing into imitating Christ. Don’t give up, don’t stay passive, don’t do nothing, do something. We need to be active, diligent and making every effort in imitating Jesus, in growing into Christlikeness. Those saved by grace make every effort, diligently in practicing Godliness. Is your prayer life growing in Christ’s way? Is your Scripture intake growing in Christ’s way? Is your obedience to God growing in Christ’s way? Are you growing in reflecting Christ in your life? I want to encourage you to make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue as Peter told the church.
- At the same time that we do every effort, we do not rely on our own strength. It is by God’s grace that we are able to “make every effort”, because it is God who empower us for so doing. **2 Peter 2:3-5** “³*His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,* ⁴*by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.* ⁵*For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue.*” Brothers, we see here that it is through God’s divine power that we are able to make every effort for godliness. All the glory is for God, “**for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure**” (Philippians 2:13).
- Brothers, I want to encourage you to be doers, not hearers only. As **James 1:22,25** says “²²**be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves....**²⁵**the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.**” This year we started practicing more discipleship in one another through the EQUIP TEAMS. Let’s make every effort, let’s be diligent in the practice imitating Christ, and helping others to do the same as we interact with one another. These are the things that we need to be thinking about, these are the things that we need to be talking about, these are the things that we need to be

doing, the things that we need to put in practice, because this is what God wants of us, for his glory.

- May God help us to grow into being more like Christ in His character, in His obedience (on being more aware of our sins and the necessity to grow in obedience), may God help us to grow into being more like Christ in our prayer life (let's be more conscious on how we are praying and let's start praying more than we are now doing), may God help us to grow into being more like Christ in our devotion to Scripture (that we do not neglect the reading and study of God's Word), and also may God help us to grow toward Christlikeness in his love for the Father and for people. Again, this is our purpose, to be conformed into the image of Christ, all for His Glory. Amen.

Let's please pray together...

Sermon 2

Dionardo Medina

Series: Biblical Discipleship

Title: Christlikeness in the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer

Text: Matthew 6:5-15

Place: Grace Fellowship Church, Hazleton, PA

Date: Sunday - 08/21/2022. AM Worship Service

Please open your Bibles and let's read together from **Matthew 6:5-15**

⁵ “And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁷ “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

⁹ Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,

¹⁰ Your kingdom come,
your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread,

¹² and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Let's please pray together to our God now: Dear heavenly Father...

Introduction

We have seeing that **Discipleship** is “the process of learning the teachings of Jesus and following after his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹ In

¹¹ Byrley, “Discipleship.”

addition, discipleship involves the process of making other disciples through teaching and evangelism. We have seen that the aim of discipleship is Christlikeness, which is the final goal of eternal election, “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). Someone who IS a disciple, will also DO or PRACTICE what his Master did, and also will assist others to grow in being like his Master. Our Lord and Master is Jesus Christ.

The Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) reflect Christ’s intense dedication into practicing spiritual disciplines. Spiritual Disciplines according to Whitney are “God-given means we are to use in the Spirit-filled pursuit of Godliness.”¹² Disciples grow in being like Christ by consistently practicing that what he practiced, in complete dependency upon the Holy Spirit, and that’s include imitating Christ in the way that he prayed.

What is Prayer? The simplest definition is that “prayer is talking to God.” John Bunyan, one of our brothers from the Seventeenth Century, in his 1663 writing “I Will Pray with the Spirit” defined it in the following way: “Prayer is a sincere, sensible, affectionate pouring out of the heart or soul to God, through Christ, in the strength and assistance of the Holy Spirit, for such things as God hath promised, or, according to the Word, for the good of the Church, with submission, in faith, to the will of God”¹³

It is evident in Scripture that Christ had a robust prayer life. I want to talk to you today and encourage you today toward Christlikeness, toward imitating Christ in the spiritual discipline of Prayer. We will go through three main points:

First, Christ prayed constantly.

Second, Christ taught us to pray.

Third, Praying the Word of God (His Will), in Jesus Name.

Point #1 – Christ Prayed Constantly

How often and persistent is your prayer life?

Do you have dedicated times in which you go to our God in prayer every day?

Do you live with the awareness that as disciples of Jesus we need to have a strong prayer life?

Do we help and equip others in growing into their prayer life?

One way disciples grow in the likeness of Jesus is by the consistent pursuit of imitating his prayer life, with dependency in the Holy Spirit who strengthened us. Christ prayed constantly. He looked for every opportunity to go alone with his heavenly Father in prayer. This is appreciated in many verses in the Gospels. After feeding five thousand **“he went up of the mountain by himself to pray and when evening came he was there alone” (Matt 14:23)**. After healing a man with withered hand, Jesus **“went to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12)**. After

¹² Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1991), 17.

¹³ Joseph C. Harrod, *40 Questions about Prayer* (Grand Rapid: Kregel, 2022), 19.

healing Simon's mother-in-law, and many other people with diseases and oppressed from demons, Christ, **“rising very early in the morning while it was still dark, he departed and went out to a desolate place, and there he prayed” (Mark 1:35)**. These are just few examples showing how important it was for Christ to practice the spiritual discipline of prayer. Jesus' disciples witnessed His devotion to a faithful prayer life, so they asked him to teach them to pray: “Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of His disciples said to him, Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1).

Point #2 – Christ Taught us to Pray

In **Matthew 6:5-15** Christ gave clear instructions to His disciples regarding prayer. It is contained within the context of the “Sermon of the Mount” (Matt 5:1 - 7:29), which is described by St. Augustin as “a perfect standard of the Christian life.”¹⁴ The Sermon of the Mount contains a compilation of Christ's teachings “bearing in different ways on the theme of discipleship . . . with the character, duties, attitudes and dangers of the Christian disciple.”¹⁵ R. Kent Hughes points out that this sermon is a compacted, congealed theology of Christ that shows where one stands in relation to the kingdom and eternal life, whether one is truly a believer/disciple, and an “antidote to the pretense and sham that plagues Christianity.”¹⁶ And part of the Sermon of the Mount is Jesus's teachings regarding prayer.

When the Lord says, **“and when you pray” (Matt 6:5a)**, he clearly “implied that prayer is the norm in the believer's life,”¹⁷ and that he expects his followers to pray.

The Greek word προσεύχομαι (proseuchesthai), translated in English as “to pray,” “to pray to,” “to ask,” “prayer,” and “petitionary prayer,” is an act of calling and talking to God, and also has the connotation that it needs to be practiced as a regular habit.¹⁸

The apostle Paul clearly understood this expectation, which is why he encouraged the Thessalonians to **“pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17)**. Prayer must be done sincerely: **“You must not be like the hypocrites” (6:5b)**. Leon Morris points out how hypocrites pray “with their eye on people when they should be concerned with God only,”¹⁹ and to pray like them is to play-act to be seen by others in order to receive praise. The motives

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 15.

¹⁵ R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 111.

¹⁶ Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 16.

¹⁷ Spiros Zodhiates, *Exegetical Commentary on Matthew* (Chattanooga: AMG, 2006), 53.

¹⁸ Heinrich Greeven, “Εύχομαι, Εύχή, Προσεύχομαι, Προσευχή,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-), 807.

¹⁹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 140.

of the heart are crucial—prayers are for God, not for gaining favor with men—and that is what Jesus is getting at when he told his disciples not to pray like them²⁰: **“For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward” (6:5b)**. A clear example of this type of prayer is taught by Jesus in **Luke 18:9-14** with the parable of the Pharisee (who was praying hypocritically to praise himself) and the tax collector (who was praying sincerely and focused on God). Let’s read these verses in **Luke 18:9-14**:

⁹ He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:

¹⁰ “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed[a] thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

¹² I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’

¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Pink indicates, “Saying prayers and pouring out the heart before God are totally different things: a self-righteous Pharisee may be diligent in the former, only one who has been born again will do the latter.”²¹

Jesus encouraged his disciples to pray in secret, verse 6 of our main text **“And your father who sees in secret will reward you” (v. 6)**. France points out, “This passage is not intended to prohibit audible prayer in public as such. While Jesus is often portrayed as praying privately (Mark 1:35; 6:46 etc.), he also on occasion prayed aloud where others could hear (11:25; 14:19; 26:39, 42; Luke 11:1). . . . The issue here is not the prayer but the motive.”²²

Public prayer is not condemned by Jesus, but the desire to be seen in public while praying is what was reproached: “the early church thrived on public prayer, as the opening chapters of Acts so beautifully attest (1:24; 3:1; 4:24). Jesus was emphasizing that prayer is essentially a conversation between the believer and God. It is intrinsically private, not exhibitionist. Man is to shut out every distraction and focus on God.”²³ With right godly motives, public orations are very appropriate, but “should represent the overflow of a vibrant personal prayer life . . . prayer ought not to be used to gain plaudits... but should

²⁰ Douglas Sean O’Donnell, *Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 158.

²¹ Arthur Walkington Pink, *An Exposition of the Sermon on the Mount* (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2005), 152.

²² R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2007), 239.

²³ Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount*, 149.

reflect genuine conversation with God.”²⁴ Disciples of Christ ought to watch the motives for their prayers both privately and publicly. Those who pray with the right motive will be rewarded with the spiritual benefits of growing into holiness and Christlikeness.²⁵

Jesus also warned his disciples in verse 7 to **“not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.”** The Greek word βατταλογήσητε (battalogēsēte) in this verse implies “babble,” “much speak,” or “meaningless repetition,” all of which indicate the repetition of the same words over and over without thinking.²⁶ Brothers and sisters, when we go to God in prayer, we need to go to him with our whole hearts and our whole mind focus on Him, we are talking with GOD, the Creator, the King.

Christ told his disciples in verse 8, **“Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”** Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes,

He sees it all. He knows your heart; other people do not. You can deceive them, and you can persuade them that you are quite selfless; but God knows your heart. . . . I sometimes feel that there is no better way of living, and trying to live, the holy and sanctified life than just to be constantly reminding ourselves of that. When we wake up in the morning we should immediately remind ourselves and recollect that we are in the presence of God. It is not a bad thing to say to ourselves before we go any further: “Throughout the whole of this day, everything I do, and say, and attempt, and think, and imagine, is going to be done under the eye of God. He is going to be with me; He sees everything; He knows everything. There is nothing I can do or attempt but God is fully aware of it all. ‘Thou God seest me.’” It would revolutionize our lives if we always did that.²⁷

God knows it all, God is omniscient. He receives no new information with prayers. He knows it all but at the same time Jesus intention in verse 8 is not to discourage prayers in his disciples, but rather he “calls for simplicity, directness, and sincerity in talking to God,”²⁸ with an honest, God-focused and humble attitude, being aware that “God knows our needs, but he has also chosen to grant some things only when his people pray,”²⁹ **James 4:2 “You do not have, because you do not ask.”**

²⁴ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 117.

²⁵ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 117.

²⁶ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 274.

²⁷ Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 2:15.

²⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 118.

²⁹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 118.

In this context Jesus teaches his disciples what is known as the Lord's Prayer. He tells them to pray like this:

Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen. (Matt 6:9-13 AV)

This Lord's prayer is a model or a pattern to guide the disciples in their prayers. It is not intended to be a constant verbatim repetition of these words. As it has already been indicated, Jesus condemned empty phrases and repetitions in prayers (Matt 6:6); instead, he warns, "do not be like them" (v. 8), in reference to the hypocrites who "love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners" (v. 5). The first three clauses of the disciple's prayer are concerned with God's praise, kingdom, and purpose, and in the last clauses disciples submit to God's sovereign priorities rather than one's own wishes and desires.³⁰

The model of prayer taught by Christ to his disciples has several parts that need to be considered. It starts with the phrase "our Father in heaven." Here, the term "Father" is "Abba," which is "a name used by children for their earthly fathers that denotes warmth and intimacy in the security of a loving father's care."³¹ Therefore, when Jesus teaches his disciples to come to God calling him father, he wants them to know they can come with the trust that exists within an intimate father-son relationship. The next part, "hallowed be thy name," reflects the desire of the one who prays that God be honored, and in this sense

to hallow God's name means to hold it in reverence—hence, to hold *him* in reverence, to honor, glorify, and exalt *him*. This is the essence of the first three of the Ten Commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything. . . . You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God" (Ex. 20:3-7; Deut. 5:7-11).³²

When one goes to God in prayer, there needs to be a self-consciousness of the fact that one is about to communicate with the most powerful and holy being in the universe; hence, that awareness encourages us to go into prayer with a sincere and humble attitude, opening our hearts fully to him, recognizing our own sinful nature in front of a Holy and perfect God. In other words, Jesus is teaching his disciples to always honor God's name, especially in their prayers.

So far we have seen that first, in prayer we acknowledge who we are praying to, Our God who is also Our Father in heaven, the one we are expected to have an intimate relationship with. Second, we honor him "Hollowed be your name", exalting God for who he is, in reverence, and knowing that we are going to talk with a Great God who deserves all glory.

³⁰ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 243.

³¹ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 275.

³² Wilkins, *Matthew*, 276.

And now, in **Matthew 6:10** we see the third segment of the disciple's prayer. Here Jesus instructs them to pray for God's kingdom to come and for his will to be done in whatever is being asked in the prayer. France points out how "the essence of the coming of God's kingship is that he is duly obeyed and his purpose fulfilled" and in this regard "the 'already—not yet' tension is here more explicit, as the situations in heaven (where God's kingship has been eternally honored) and on earth (where it is yet to be fully acknowledged) are compared. The time must come when God's human creatures join his angelic forces in honoring and serving their king."³³ In this segment of the Lord's prayer Jesus is teaching his disciples that the deep desire of those who follow him is to see the kingdom of God fully manifested on earth; a time in which all will completely submit to the lordship of God and obey him with love and joy. In this part of the disciple's prayer, Jesus makes clear how doing the will of God summarizes what it means to be his disciple.³⁴

So far we have seen that first, in prayer we acknowledge who we are praying to, Our God who is also Our Father in heaven; second, we dedicate a time to honor him for what he is, thinking in his attributes; Third, we pray for his Kingdom, in which we submit to his Lordship as our King, and desire his of his coming

The fourth part/petition is "give us this day our daily bread" (**Matt 6:11**). Here Jesus teaches his disciples the principle of daily dependence on God for all their physical and spiritual needs. In specifying "today," it also implies that his disciples should not be anxious for the needs of tomorrow because they can trust in their heavenly Father who sovereignly provides their daily needs, trusting in God one day at a time. This part of the prayer should not only acknowledge that God is the provider of our physical and daily needs, but also while meditating in this truth, we also give thanks to our God for all that he has already given us. In **Philippians 4:6** we read "do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

The fifth portion of the prayer is concerned with asking God's forgiveness for sins committed and at the same time acknowledging that Christ's disciples also pardon those that sin against them (**Matt 6:12**). France points out that "disciples are to forgive those who have wronged them . . . doing so serves as evidence that a person has truly been forgiven his or her debt of sin. If we don't forgive, it is evidence that we haven't experienced forgiveness ourselves."³⁵

The six and final clause/part/petition of the lord's prayer is about asking God for protection—asking God for help and deliverance from committing future sins. In other words, asking God for preservation of falling into temptations during daily spiritual battles in one's sinful nature (**Matt 6:13**). In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus instructed

³³ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 247.

³⁴ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 247.

³⁵ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 279.

his disciples to pray in this same way: **“Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matt 26:41).**

Regarding this last part of the disciple’s prayer, Craig Bloomberg indicates,

“Lead us not into temptation” does not imply “don’t bring us to the place of temptation” or “don’t allow us to be tempted.” God’s Spirit has already done both of these with Jesus (Matt 4:1). Nor does the clause imply “don’t tempt us” because God has promised never to do that anyway (James 1:13). Rather, in light of the probable Aramaic underlying Jesus’ prayer, these words seem best taken as “don’t let us succumb to temptation” (cf. Mark 14:38) or “don’t abandon us to temptation.”³⁶

Point #3. Praying the Word of God (His Will), in Jesus Name

A very important consideration when we pray is that we must make every effort to intentionally pray the Word of God. When we pray God’s Word we are praying for his will in our life. In the same way that a child learns to speak from His parents, repeat those words and tell them back, in that same way, we as Children of God, learn what to speak also from our heavenly Father, as contained in his Word, and we speak those Words to him in prayer, Words that contain His will for us. What is important is not what we want to pray, but what God wants us to pray. We read **Jeremiah 17:9** “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” Dietrich Bonhoeffer says “If we are to pray aright, perhaps it is quite necessary that we pray contrary to our own heart... The richness of the Word of God to determine our prayer, not the poverty of our heart... This is pure grace, that God tells us how we can speak with him and have fellowship with him.” When we ask God wrongly things, when we ask God for different realities contrary that what God wills for us in His Word, then the prayer is not answered. God says in **James 4:3** “You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. Asking God wrongly things to spend in our passions is like a fantasy-type of prayer, a manifestation of the heart that struggle of self-love and self-glory, in which praying for material needs takes priority over praying for the will of God. So brothers and sisters I encourage that what you pray is that God wants for his children as stated in His Word: That we grow in Christlikeness for His Glory, that we grow in the fruit of the Spirit for His glory, giving priority to spiritual blessings rather than material blessings. **Colossians 3:2** says “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth,” and this is especially truth when you are having are devotional prayer time with God.

It is also essential to remember that the spiritual discipline of prayer should not be associated with mysticism. Mysticism can be understood as “the search for a higher initiation into spiritual mysteries, or a higher consecration to spiritual realities, by a withdrawal from the external world and by means of contemplation [emptiness of the mind].”³⁷ Mysticism is dangerous because it pursues spirituality and truths the wrong

³⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 120.

³⁷ Alan Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Emerald, 2002), 293.

way, through experiential connection with supernatural powers and the divine by means of higher consecration, contemplation, and rituals apart from the revealed Word of God. The practice of discipleship in Christianity and mysticism are mutually exclusive. Sadly, some mystic practices have infiltrated many self-proclaimed Christians movements and churches. An example of this practices is infiltration of eastern meditation rather than biblical prayer. Richard Foster, a Quaker theologian, manifest concerns on how eastern meditation, which “is an attempt to empty the mind,”³⁸ is in reality contrary Christian meditation. Gregg Hammond comments that attempts to empty the mind “are indicative not of true Christian meditation, dwelling on the Word, but of a mystical non-Christian method more closely related to transcendental meditation.”³⁹ Christian meditation and prayer, rather than pursuing the emptiness of mind, should pursue the fullness of it with the Word of God (Phil. 4:8, 1 Tim. 4:15). Alan Cairns states “to meditate deeply and continuously upon a scriptural theme, in a prayerful spirit, will mortify the flesh, and be a means of sweet communion with the Lord.”⁴⁰ Consequently, in genuine, unaltered and biblical Christianity, “higher consecration can be experienced only through a progressive sanctification or conformity to Christ, which is a work of God’s Spirit [through His Word], not the product of a course of contemplation.”⁴¹

So, God wants us to pray with Scripture in mind, meditating in it, asking for His will as stated in his Word. And when we pray in Jesus Name, we are praying the will of God under His Son authority. Praying in Jesus name is not a magic word, if what we asked is not biblical, we are not praying in Jesus name, even we the word is said at the end of the prayer. **1 John 5:14-15** says “¹⁴ And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him.” And **John 14:13** says “Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” Brother and sisters, Christ is glorified when we pray to God according to His will.

Conclusion and Final Words of Application

Brothers and sisters, we have seen that Christ was a man of prayer. I want to encourage all of you to be imitators of Christ and be people of prayer too. Christ told his disciples how to pray. In the Lord’s prayer He wants us to fist adore God thinking on His attributes, and also that we confess and ask forgiveness for our sins and forgive others, and also that we ask with a thankful heart (thanksgiving), and that we intercede in supplication for the spiritual blessings of our brothers and sisters too. **Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication, and intersections (A.C.T.S).**

³⁸ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, rev. ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), 24.

³⁹ Greg Hammond, *Mystic Seduction: Awakening Christians to a Real and Present Danger* (Greencastle, IN: Be Alert, 2014), 281.

⁴⁰ Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 293-94.

⁴¹ Cairns, *Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 293.

Discipleship implies growing in Christlikeness in the spiritual discipline of prayer, let's follow his steps, and equip and encourage one another in these habits.

Sometimes it is difficult for us to concentrate in prayer, as distractions comes sometimes, like for example thoughts of worries, problems, or difficulties of the day comes and distract us from our prayer. Let's make every effort to have quality time in prayer with our Lord. Sometimes we feel that we don't have the desire or the strength to pray, in those times, let's remember what **Romans 8:26** says "the Spirit helps us in our weakness." Brother and sisters, let's do this relying in the Holy Spirit help. I want to encourage all of us today, let's grow in our prayer life.

Let's please finish by praying together now...

Sermon 3

Dionardo Medina

Series: Biblical Discipleship

Title: Christlikeness in Scripture Intake

Text: Luke 2:46-47

Place: Grace Fellowship Church, Hazleton, PA

Date: Sunday - 08/28/2022. AM Worship Service

Please open your Bibles and let's read together from **Luke 2:46-47**.

⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.

⁴⁷ And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

Let's please pray together: Dear heavenly Father...

Introduction

We have seen that **Discipleship** is “the process of learning the teachings of Jesus and following after his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁴² In addition, discipleship involves the process of making other disciples through teaching and evangelism. We have seen that the aim or purpose of discipleship is **Christlikeness**. Christlikeness is the final goal of eternal election, “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). Someone who IS a disciple, will also DO or PRACTICE what his Master did, and also will assist others to grow in being like his Master. Our Lord and Master is Jesus Christ.

Last week we talked about Christlikeness in The Spiritual Discipline of Prayer. We saw how Christ was a man of prayer, and His disciples are expected to imitate Him and be people of prayer too, and that's why Jesus Told us how to pray. My hope is that we are making every effort to grow and practice these things. That we are not passive people but proactive people in pursuing what the Lord wants us to do. We also saw how Scripture encourages us to imitate Christ, making every effort and being diligent in our pursuit of virtue and godliness, that is only able when we are IN CHRIST, through His power and for His glory.

Today we continue talking about ways in which we imitate Christ in our personal life, and also encourage, help and equip others for the same in discipleship, and the subject for today is **Christlikeness in Scriptural Intake**.

⁴² Byrley, “Discipleship.”

We will cover three points:

Point #1. Our Lord Jesus Christ was a Man of Scriptural Intake

Point #2. Reading, Studying, Meditating and Memorizing God's Word.

Point #3. Doers of the Word, not only readers and hearers.

Point #1. Our Lord Jesus Christ was a Man of Scriptural Intake

The gospel of Luke shows how Christ, since a young age, was devoted to Scripture. This devotion can be clearly appreciated through the narration of the twelve years old Jesus in the temple seen in Luke chapter 2.

Verses 41 and 42, "now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up according to custom."

Jesus was brought to Jerusalem by Joseph and Mary for the Feast of the Passover in the Jewish month of Nisan (late March and early April), a feast that celebrated Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Exod 12).

Verses 43 to 45, "And when the feast was ended, as they were returning, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. His parents did not know it, but supposing him to be in the group they went a day's journey, but then they began to search for him among their relatives and acquaintances, and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, searching for him."

When the feast of Passover ended, "the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:43) without his parents knowing about it. After a day journey of returning, which is about twenty to twenty-five miles.⁴³ After a day, then Joseph and Mary realized Jesus was not with them when they searched for him "among their relatives and acquaintances" (v. 44), so they went back to Jerusalem to find Jesus.

They look for Jesus for three days, and "After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions" (v. 46).

Usually "teaching by the rabbis may have taken place within the temple precincts or a neighboring synagogue. . . . The hearers sat on the ground, at the feet of the teachers who were themselves seated, on the analogy of synagogue practice."⁴⁴ Joel Green points out that Jesus was raised "in a pious environment, but his commitment to God's purpose transcends that piety and that environment."⁴⁵ Here, "Jesus is depicted as an eager

⁴³ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 121.

⁴⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 127.

⁴⁵ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 155.

student, learning in the dialogical pattern of the day.”⁴⁶ Leon Morris explains the fact that Jesus stayed for days in the temple after the Passover feast, listening to the teachers and asking them questions, indicated a thirst in Jesus for knowledge as “there would have been few good teachers in Nazareth, and Jesus was making the most of the opportunity of learning while he was in the capital city. The educational system of the day seems to have put emphasis on the discussion of problems. This gave scope for a bright pupil both to ask and answer questions.”⁴⁷

All the teachers in the temple and all who heard him “were amazed at his understanding and his answers” (v. 47). “Even at this young age Jesus has amazing knowledge of the things of God... Already early in life [at only 12 years of age] Jesus values the pursuit of comprehending God, as he increases in ‘wisdom and stature’ (Luke 2:52).”⁴⁸

Brothers and sisters, Christlikeness. Are we imitating Jesus in his devotion, passion and love for Scripture? Since a young age, our Lord Jesus Christ was seeking understanding of Scripture, was devoted to Holy Scripture, He loved and enjoyed talking to others about Scripture. Certainly we as His followers, as His disciples, ought to follow our Master in this too and do the same. Another way in which we imitate Jesus is by also making every effort and being diligent in reading and studying and meditating and memorizing, and talking to each other the Word of God in the Bible as much as we can.

Another element which proves that Jesus Christ devoted himself to the study of Scripture can be appreciated on how Christ interacted with those who opposed him, showing, with Scripture, the truth of His teachings. If Jesus did not study, if Jesus did not memorize Scripture, He would had not been able to fight against those who oppose his ministry, including Satan, many scribes and Pharisees and people of power who hated him during his earthly redemptive ministry.

When tempted in the wilderness, Christ won over Satan’s temptations because of his knowledge of Scripture, interpreting it in its correct context (Matthew 4:1-11).

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

³ And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”

⁴⁶ John Nolland, *Luke 1:1-9:20*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 35A (Dallas: Word, 1989), 130.

⁴⁷ Leon Morris, *Luke*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 3 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 108.

⁴⁸ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 100.

⁴ But he answered, “It is written, ““Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.””

Brothers and sisters, here we see our Lord Jesus Christ, reciting to Satan Scripture that He had already read, studied, meditated and memorized. In here Jesus is citing what He learned and memorized from Deuteronomy 8:3 in which Yahweh is telling the Israelites to remember about how He fed them in the dessert, telling them “³ And He [Yahweh], and He humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” You see brothers, Jesus is using the sword of the Spirit (the Word of God) to fight against temptation from Satan. Do we imitate Jesus in this way? Brothers, sisters, in our trials, in our temptations, in our spiritual battles, only the Word of God can be our effective weapon to fight against the enemy. But if we don’t study it, if we don’t know it, if we don’t mediate on it, if we don’t memorize it, then our chances of fighting effectively against the enemy temptations will be decreased significantly. Again, this text proves how Christ was devoted to Scriptural Intake.

Now verse 5 of Matthew chapter 4.

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple

⁶ and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, ““He will command his angels concerning you,’ and ““On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.””

⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’”

Here, Satan quoted to Jesus **Psalms 99:11-12**: “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, He will command his angels concerning you, and, on their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Brothers and sister, in here we see Satan using a text out of context in order to try and trick Jesus. Wilkins points out that in this text, “The original Old Testament context does not imply that God will send protecting care for every harmful situation. Jesus sees through the devil’s Scripture-twisting to the sinister motivation behind it.” The devil wanted to convinced Jesus into deliberately jumping off, when the psalmist intention was talking about his unintentional stumbling. Blomberg rightly points out that “we must not test God’s faithfulness to his word by manufacturing situations in which we try to force him to act in certain ways. We dare not deliberately put our lives in danger as some

kind of fleece.”⁴⁹ Jesus, who studied, and interpreted Scripture correctly, refuted the devil’s Scripture and our Lord Jesus Christ cited, again from memory, Deuteronomy 6:16, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test...” Brothers and sisters, Christ did not only knew Scripture, but he also interpreted Scripture in its context, memorizing great portion of God’s Word too, and it is because of Christ knowledge of Scripture in its context that he was also able to fight against Satan’s temptation in an effective manner. Christ devotion to Scripture was demonstrated during his earthly ministry in the ways he used the Word correctly. Let’s imitate our Master, let’s be imitators of Christ in this aspect too.

Now Verse 8 of Matthew chapter 4,

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory.

⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.”

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ““You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.””

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

For Jesus to be able to refute his opponents with truth, he first needed to know Scripture well. He had a hunger for God’s Word and was disciplined in Scripture intake. Consequently, He acquired exemplary knowledge of it, which is clearly evidenced by the way He rebuked Satan, and later on Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes and others. Because of Jesus’s study and knowledge of Scripture He was able to successfully discern the devil’s twisting, rightly interpreting it by taking into account the whole context of the text. Jesus’s knowledge of the Bible also prevented those with evil motives to trick Him with mischaracterized texts. Christ’s disciples ought to follow His example and love for Scripture, something that was evident even when our Lord Jesus Christ was a child with only 12 years old. The way Christ studied, meditated, lived, and applied Scripture is an example that needs to be imitated by His disciples.

The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit as we see in Ephesians 6:17, and we need it to fight evil in us and also against us with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God is also “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16-17) and we as Christians are called to be equipping one another with God’s Word in our conversations.

Let’s go now go to point #2.

⁴⁹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 85.

Point #2. Reading, Studying, Meditating and Memorizing God’s Word

Few questions to reflect. How often do you read your Bible? Do you take time to think and meditate on Scripture on a regular basis? Do you enjoy reading God’s Word?

Donald Whitney cites a survey done by Barna Research Group among people who professed to be “born again Christian” that disclosed very disheartening numbers: “only 18 percent – less than 2 of every ten – read the Bible every day. Worst of all, 23 percent – almost 1 in four professing Christians – say they never read the Word of God.”⁵⁰ This is not the only one, a more recent survey done by LifeWay Research in which they asked the question to professed Christians who attend protestant churches regularly on how often they read their Bible had the following responses: 32% say they read the Bible personally every day. Around a quarter (27%) say they read it a few times a week. Fewer said they only read it once a week (12%), a few times a month (11%) or once a month (5%). Close to 1 in 8 (12%) admit they rarely or never read the Bible.⁵¹

If we are going to imitate Christ in Scripture intake, then we need to make every effort to read and meditate on the Word of God every day. This is Vital. There is no healthy Christian life apart from reading the Word of God. Scripture says in **1 Peter 2:2**, “**Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.**”

A follower of Christ makes every effort to read and meditate on Scripture every day, and also dedicate time in studying His Word.

Psalm 119:97

“ Oh how I love your law!
It is my meditation all the day.”

Acts 17:11

“the Berean Jew... received the message with great eagerness and **examined the Scriptures every day** to see if what Paul said was true.”

Ezra 7:10

“For Ezra had set his heart to **study the Law of the Lord**, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.”

Psalm 119:15-16

¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts
and fix my eyes on your ways.

⁵⁰ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 32.

⁵¹ Aaron Earls, “Few Protestant Churchgoers Read the Bible Daily,” Lifeway Research, July 2, 2019, <https://research.lifeway.com/2019/07/02/few-protestant-churchgoers-read-the-bible-daily/>.

¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.

This is just few examples of verses that encourages us to meditate in God's Word every day, to examined and study Scripture every day, to delight in Scripture, and to not forget (after memorizing) His Word.

The church father Augustine dedicated a great amount of his writings in encouraging the Christians of the fourth and fifth centuries to read, meditate and live according to Scripture.⁵² Theonas of Alexandria, a bishop from the 3rd century, emphasized the following: "Let no day pass by without reading some portion of the Sacred Scriptures, at such convenient hour as offers, and giving some space to meditation. And never cast off the habit of reading in the Holy Scriptures; for nothing feeds the soul and enriches the mind so well as those sacred studies do."⁵³

Irenaeus, another church father, taught the Christians of the second and third centuries how to read and interpret difficult passages, advocating that "ambiguous passages must be interpreted in light of passages that are clear and straightforward,"⁵⁴ which later became one of the general principles in the field of hermeneutics or biblical interpretation "Scripture interprets Scripture." Irenaeus called his readers "to develop a sound mind... devoted to piety and the love of the truth,"⁵⁵ and later defined a devout or sound mind as one who will "eagerly meditate upon those things which God has placed within the power of humankind, and has subjected to our knowledge, and will make advancement in [getting acquaintance with] them, rendering the knowledge of them easy to him by means of daily study."⁵⁶

Many reformers and puritans throughout history also faithfully practiced and encouraged the Christians of their time in the spiritual discipline of daily Scripture intake. Martin Luther directly linked sanctification to Scripture intake, pointing out that the "desires of the flesh are overcome ... only by the earnest meditation of the Word of God and invocation of Christ."⁵⁷ **The puritan Thomas Watson in his work "The Godly Man's Picture"** highlighted how a genuine disciple of Jesus is somebody who loves his Word, who loves Scripture, and furthermore, who shows his love for the Word by diligently

⁵² Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, in *St. Augustin's City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. J. F. Shaw, vol. 2, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1887), 533.

⁵³ Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, 145.

⁵⁴ Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, 145.

⁵⁵ Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, 145.

⁵⁶ Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine*, 145.

⁵⁷ Elmer L. Towns, "Martin Luther on Sanctification," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126 (1969): 121.

reading it, meditating on it, delighting in it, defending it, preferring it above things most precious, talking about it, and most importantly, by being conformed and molded to it.⁵⁸

So many examples and teachings from prior saints regarding Scripture intake in order to achieve Christian maturity and to grow in Christlikeness, all of this serving as an encouragement for disciples of today do to also imitate. The spiritual discipline of Bible INTAKE continues to be vital in each believer discipleship journey.

Scripture intake has also an essential role for parents in instructing and training their children in the Lord's way, particularly in a society that hates every day more and more the truth contained in God's Word. One of our own, our beloved pastor Tedd Tripp points out that: "The only safe guide is the Bible. It is the revelation of a God who has infinite knowledge and can therefore give you absolute truth... It presents an accurate and comprehensive picture of children, parents, family life, values, training, nurture and discipline."⁵⁹

Deuteronomy 6:5-9

⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

With this we go now to our last point.

Point #3. Doers of the Word, not only Readers and Hearers

We hear, read, study, mediate, and memorize the Word of God in order for it to be applied in our life, in order to live according to what we learn in it.

We read in James 1:21-22: "²¹ Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. ²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Brothers and sisters, we need to be intentional and make every effort in putting to practice what we hear, read and learn from the Bible. Intentional acts from our part are required, to be doers and not only readers or hearers. Richardson in his commentary of the book of James says the following, "If the Word implanted is dynamic, working salvation, it is imperative that believers do what the Word says (the verse in Gk. reads lit., "Become doers of the word and not only hearers, deceiving yourselves"). Certainly there is a sense of development or growth here. Being doers of the Word involves becoming, but the force here is in being

⁵⁸ Thomas Watson, *The Godly Man's Picture* (1966; repr., Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2013), 60-63.

⁵⁹ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 1995), xix.

who one is because the Word is resident within. Disciples are to “receive” the Word of God by “being” believers who do what that Word requires.”⁶⁰

Our Lord Jesus Christ said, in Luke 11:28 “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.” Dear Brothers and Sisters, we read the Bible for the purpose of obeying and keeping it, and by doing so growing into Christlikeness. How sad it is to know the Word but not do what it says. Satan knows the word, demons know the word, some liberal universities has atheist theologians who have read and studied Scripture more than you and me but do not believe it nor applied it. You see brothers, a disciple of Christ does not only hears, read, study, meditate and memorize God’s Word, but in addition to all that, a real disciple of Christ practices what his Master teaches.

This is exactly what Jesus taught His disciples in the parable of the sower, in Luke 8:

⁵“A sower went out to sow his seed. And as he sowed, some fell along the path and was trampled underfoot, and the birds of the air devoured it. ⁶ And some fell on the rock, and as it grew up, it withered away, because it had no moisture. ⁷ And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up with it and choked it. ⁸ And some fell into good soil and grew and yielded a hundredfold.”

¹¹ Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. ¹² The ones along the path are those who **have heard**; then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. ¹³ And the ones on the rock are those who, when **they hear the word, receive it with joy**. But these have no root; they believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away. ¹⁴ And as for what fell among the thorns, they are **those who hear**, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature. ¹⁵ **As for that in the good soil, they are those who, hearing the word, hold it fast in an honest and good heart, and bear fruit with patience.**

Many hears the Word, and receive it with Joy, but only a few bear fruits, only a few are doers. I want to encourage you all here, let’s all of us here today, relying in God’s power and strength, to make every effort, and be diligent in keeping what you learn from God’s Word in your life.

Conclusion and Final Words of Application

We have seen that our Lord Jesus Christ was a man devoted to reading, studying, meditating and memorizing Scripture since a young age.

I want to encourage all of you to imitate Christ in the way he devoted himself to Scripture. Let’s be more like Christ in His love and devotion for God’s Word.

At the same time, let’s not be people who only knows the Word, let’s also be people who practices it, who obeys it, and who lives according to what is stated in the Word. Let’s be doers, and not only hearers. We do this not relying in our strength, but IN CHRIST alone.

⁶⁰ Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, The New American Commentary, vol. 36 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 94.

2 Peter 2:3 ^{“3} *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence.*

Brothers and sisters, it is through the power that God Has granted us, by his Holy Spirit, that we are able to grow in Christlikeness, including prayer and biblical intake, in order to BE disciples who LOVE His Word and PRACTICE what is in it. Disciples also TALK ABOUT GOD’S WORD CONSTANTLY to one another, our conversations as brothers and sisters need to be filled with Scripture, as this is the main way in which we equip and help each other toward holiness and Christlikeness, “speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,” Ephesians 4:15.

Let’ please pray together...

Sermon 4

Dionardo Medina

Series: Biblical Discipleship

Title: Christlikeness in the Spiritual Discipline of Fasting

Text: Mathew 6:16-18

Place: Grace Fellowship Church, Hazleton, PA

Date: Sunday - 09/04/2022. AM Worship Service

Please open your Bibles and let's read together from Matthew 6:16-18

¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Let's please pray together: Dear heavenly Father...

Introduction

Again, we have seen that **Discipleship** is “the process of learning the teachings of Jesus and following after his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁶¹ In addition, discipleship involves the process of **making other disciples** through the equipping of one another in the truth of the Word. We have seen that the aim or purpose of discipleship is **Christlikeness**. Christlikeness is the final goal of eternal election, “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29). Someone who IS a disciple, will also DO or PRACTICE what his Master did, and also will equip/help/assist others to grow in being like his Master. Our Lord and Master is Jesus Christ.

We talked about Christlikeness in The Spiritual Discipline of Prayer. We saw how Christ was a man of prayer, and His disciples are expected to imitate Him and be people of prayer too, and that's why Jesus told us how to pray.

Most recently, last week we talked about Christlikeness in the Spiritual Discipline of Bible Intake. We talked that our Lord Jesus Christ was a man devoted to reading, studying, meditating and memorizing Scripture since a young age, and we as disciples of Christ are expected to imitate Christ in the way he devoted to Scripture. We saw that we need to be lovers of the Word of God, and also doers of the Word of God, people who practices it, who obeys it, and who lives according to what is stated in the Word of GOD, not relying in our strength, but IN CHRIST alone, who has “*granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence. (2 Peter 2:3).*”

⁶¹ Byrley, “Discipleship.”

Today we continue talking about ways in which we imitate Christ in our personal life, and also encourage, help and equip others for the same in discipleship, and the subject for today is **Christlikeness in the Spiritual Discipline of Fasting**.

Fasting involves the voluntary and purposeful abstinence from food for the pursue of spiritual matters, for a determined amount of time, in devotion to our God.

Dr. Joel R. Beeke, president of puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, stated “Fasting is an important biblical discipline for private and public devotion. Yet it is generally forgotten today, as if it were part of some extreme asceticism that we have outgrown.”⁶² Steven Lee, founder of SermonAudio, have said “Unfortunately, fasting has become unpopular or simply uncomfortable to many churches, despite the wealth of spiritual benefit and blessing that can be enjoyed if it is properly understood.”⁶³ Jeff Pollard, a pastor, and also editor of Free Grace Broadcaster, have indicated, “In His most famous sermon, Jesus Christ said to His Disciples, ‘When ye fast.’ Assuming their practice of that discipline. However, many in our day assume that fasting was laid in the tomb with our Savior and did not come out with Him.” Donald Whitney in his book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* indicated that “Fasting is the most feared and misunderstood of all Spiritual Disciplines... Few disciplines go so radically against the flesh and the mainstream of culture as this one. But we cannot overlook its biblical significance. Of course, some people, for medical reasons [*for example type 1 or type 2 diabetes, hypoglycemia, adrenal insufficiency, or others that could make it dangerous, in this instances this people*], cannot fast. But [*if not medical contraindications*] most of us dare not overlook fasting’s benefits in the disciplined pursuit of a Christian life.”⁶⁴

Brothers and sisters, part of our Christlikeness journey is growing into practicing all that our Lord did, and fasting, when done properly in a biblical sense, is another spiritual discipline that benefits disciples in their spiritual growth, as it help us focus in spiritual matters.

Today we will be going through three main points:

- Point #1. Our Lord Jesus Christ did Fast.
- Point #2. Christ taught us to fast and expects us to do so.
- Point #3. Fasting done with a biblical purpose.

Point #1. Our Lord Jesus Christ did Fast.

Fasting was another spiritual discipline practiced by Christ. After His baptism, he fasted for forty days and forty nights before formally beginning his earthly ministry.

⁶² Paul David Washer, *Understanding the Discipline of Fasting* (Redford, VA: HeartCry, 2021), iii.

⁶³ Washer, *Understanding the Discipline of Fasting*, iii.

⁶⁴ Whitney, *Spiritual Discipline for the Cristian Life*, 159-60.

Matthew 3:16-4:

¹⁶ And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; ¹⁷ and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”

⁴ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

Even though this particular prolonged fasting by Christ “is not presented as a model for His followers to practice . . . [because it is] an experience unique to the Son of God at the outset of His mission.”⁶⁵ Nevertheless, when Jesus told His disciples, “and when you fast” (Matt 6:16), he implicitly expressed his expectation for them to practice this spiritual discipline.

His disciples after Him, imitating Christ, were also people of fasting and there are several verses in Scripture which proves that the disciple fasted after Christ ascension.

Also many of Christ next follower throughout history imitated Christ in practicing this spiritual discipline.

Point #2. Christ taught us to fast and expect us to do so.

Let’s please read Matthew 6:16-18 again,

¹⁶ “And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.

¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face,

¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

In addition to practicing the spiritual discipline of fasting, as we have seen in the first point, Jesus also expected His disciples to observe it in the right manner. This expectation is clearly understood when He tells them, “and when you fast” (v. 16), and that is why He teaches them how to do it. Fasting was not new for the disciples, as it was normally practice by the Israelites in which persons “deliberately go without food, usually as a way of honoring God or as part of a period of meditation and prayer.”⁶⁶ Moons indicates,

For the Jewish community of Jesus’ day, the three primary expressions of piety were charity, prayer, and fasting. . . The only official Jewish day of fasting was the Day of Atonement, when eating, drinking, bathing, and anointing with oil were forbidden.

⁶⁵ France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 130.

⁶⁶ Barclay Moon Newman and Philip C. Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1992), 174.

The Jews would also fast in connection with the celebration of days of national disaster, and it was frequently done on a private and individual basis as well.⁶⁷

Christ advised His disciples to guard their hearts and motives when fasting: “Do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others” (v. 16b). Rather, “it should be in sincerity . . . for the glory of God, not for ostentation and appearance unto men.”⁶⁸ The hypocrites that Jesus was referring to practiced fasting for the appearance of piety, and not with godly motives and sincere heart, with no “contrition or humiliation of soul in them, which is the life and soul of the duty. Theirs were mock-fasts, the show and shadow without the substance.”⁶⁹ Instead, Christ encouraged his disciples that when fasting they should anoint their head and wash their face, that their fasting may not be seen by others but their heavenly Father in secret (v. 17). “As with almsgiving and prayer, those who fast must not advertise their piety by visible signs of suffering and deprivation . . . instead people must groom themselves according to cultural norms in order to appear joyful and content.”⁷⁰

Although Jesus encouraged fasting in secret, it is not a prohibition of corporate fasting, when done with godly motives, as the apostles and the early church did practice fasting comparatively:

Acts 13:2: “While **they were worshiping the Lord and fasting**, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.”

Acts 14:23: “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, **with prayer and fasting** they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

The frequency of fasting is not stated by Christ, and as Whitney points out, “It’s interesting that Jesus gives us no command regarding how often or how long we should fast. Just like all the other spiritual disciplines, **fasting is not to be a legalistic routine**. It is a privilege and an opportunity to seek God’s grace that is open to us as often as we desire.”⁷¹

Unfortunately, fasting is neglected in many churches. There is little preaching about it and little practice of it, neither personally nor corporately. In the *Institutes of Christian Religion* John Calvin writes, “Let us, therefore, say something about fasting, since very

⁶⁷ Newman and Stine, *A Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*, 174.

⁶⁸ Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible* (New York: Robert Carter, 1853), 3:28.

⁶⁹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1639.

⁷⁰ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 121.

⁷¹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 164.

many, while they do not understand how useful it is, regard it as not very necessary; others also, considering it superfluous, completely reject it. And, since its use is not well understood, it can easily lapse into superstition.”⁷²

Many saints of the past understood that Christ taught us to fast because He expected us to do so and that’s why its practice continued by Christians throughout history. As fasting was practiced and taught by Jesus, by the church fathers, by many reformers, puritans, and many other saints of the past, it doesn’t make sense that many of us contemporary believers have neglected this important discipline. It is understandable that some Christians are not able to fast due to medical conditions, and in those cases, they should not do it, or if they do it, should be limited, with medical supervision and/or approved by their physicians. However, if no medical contraindications exist, Christ followers are expected to fast, as clearly indicated by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

As fasting has been a historical practice of the church (usually accompanied with a dedicated time of Scripture reading, meditations on it, and prayers), this is a discipline that needs to be restored by the church of today and in which contemporary believers need to be biblically and historically educated on.

Tertullian, one of the church fathers of the past, advocated for this spiritual discipline, but at the same time warned about extremism. While encouraging and being in favor of the discipline of fasting as above indicated, Tertullian in his treatise also warned against extremism in this practice, condemning certain groups that exaggerated this discipline and distorted its biblical purpose, and being against “the heretics who would enjoin *perpetual* abstinence to the extent of destroying and despising the works of the Creator.”⁷³

John Calvin also encouraged the believers in practicing the discipline of fasting, warning Christians that it should not be done in a mechanical or superstitious way, but rather from the heart, urging believers “to ‘rend their hearts, not their garments’ [Joel 2:13]”⁷⁴ and pointing out that “God does not greatly esteem fasting of itself, unless an inner emotion of the heart is present, and true displeasure at one’s sin, true humility, and true sorrowing arising from the fear of God.”⁷⁵

Fasting is more effective when done in accordance with other spiritual activities, and is less effective when is done alone. In other words, it is not only fast, but also being

⁷² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 1:1241.

⁷³ Tertullian, *On Fasting in Opposition to the Psychics*, in *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian, Part Fourth; Minucius Felix; Commodian; Origen, Parts First and Second*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 4 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 112.

⁷⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:1245.

⁷⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:1245.

involved in spiritual devotion when we are practicing this discipline. Arthur Hildersham, a puritan of the 17th century, instructed the believers of his times regarding the things to do and/or to consider doing while fasting, and he included:

1. Reading Word of God:

Nehemiah 9:3: And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God.

Jeremiah 36:5-7: “And Jeremiah ordered Baruch, saying, “I am banned from going to the house of the Lord, so you are to go, and on a day of fasting in the hearing of all the people in the Lord's house you shall read the words of the Lord from the scroll that you have written at my dictation. You shall read them also in the hearing of all the men of Judah who come out of their cities. It may be that their plea for mercy will come before the Lord, and that everyone will turn from his evil way, for great is the anger and wrath that the Lord has pronounced against this people.”

2. Singing and Praising and Thanking God is also something we should consider doing when fasting.

Ephesians 5:18-20 “¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,”

3. Another activity when we fast that absolutely needs to be present is prayers. In many instances in Scripture in which the people are fasting, they are also complementing it with a time of prayer. We see then together in Mark 9:29.

Mark 9:29 (KJV): “²⁹ And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.”

Ezra 8:23: “So we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty.”

4. Another activity when we fast that is recommended to be present is examining our hearts for sin concomitantly with pursuing repentance and obedience.

1 John 1:8-9: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

In light of examples and teachings from saints of the past, today disciples will benefit greatly spiritually with incorporating the practice of fasting into their life. There is no biblical justification for neglecting this discipline if a person is able to do it, in

moderation and without excesses, if no medical contraindications, and in connection with prayer and studying the Word of God. Our brother Paul Washer, founder and director of HeartCry Missionary Society indicates that “as genuine fasting reveals a passion for God and a dependence upon His power as well as a concern for others, the neglect of fasting may be an indicator of apathy toward God and excessive delight in or dependence upon self and the temporal pleasures of this world.”⁷⁶ John Piper relates Christian fasting with having “a hunger for all the fullness of God (Ephesians 3:19), aroused by the aroma of Jesus’s love and by the taste of God’s goodness in the gospel of Christ (1 Peter 2:2-3)”.⁷⁷ All of above historical and contemporary saints give us clear biblical and theoretical arguments on why the discipline of fasting needs to be restored in practice by today disciples.

With this, we now go to point #3.

Point #3. Fasting done with a Biblical Purpose

When we fast, it would be ideal to have a specific purpose in mind. In Scripture, we can find many reasons for which God’s people fasted. One of them includes the following:

1. Seeking God’s guidance.

Judges 20:26-28: “**26** Then all the people of Israel, the whole army, went up and came to Bethel and wept. They sat there before the Lord and fasted that day until evening, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the Lord. **27** And the people of Israel inquired of the Lord (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days, **28** and Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron, ministered before it in those days), saying, “Shall we go out once more to battle against our brothers, the people of Benjamin, or shall we cease?” And the Lord said, “Go up, for tomorrow I will give them into your hand.”

Acts 14:23 “And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”

2. Another biblical purpose is seeking deliverance or protection.

Esther 4:16 “Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my young women will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”

⁷⁶ Washer, *Understanding the Discipline of Fasting*, 14.

⁷⁷ John Piper, *A Hunger for God: Desiring God through Fasting and Prayer* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1997), 43.

3. Another biblical purpose is asking God's help in overcoming temptation and dedication to God. We see how our Lord Jesus fasted while fighting temptation against the enemy in Matthew 4.

These are just few examples of ways in which we can practice this spiritual discipline with a biblical purpose in mind, there are many others. I encourage you that when you decide to practice this, do it in a biblical way with a purpose.

Conclusion and Final Words of application

We have explored three points today

Point #1. Our Lord Jesus Christ did Fast.

Point #2. Christ taught us to fast and expects us to do so.

Point #3. Fasting done with a biblical purpose.

Disciples grow in the likeness of Jesus by the constant pursuit of imitating Jesus, and that includes incorporating the discipline of fasting in our devotion, in dependency of the Holy Spirit. If you have a medical condition that make it difficult or prevent you to do it, that's understandable, in that case, talk to your doctor about this. Otherwise, Christ expects us to imitate him in everything, including the spiritual discipline of fasting. Have you ever fasted in your life? When was the last time you dedicated a devotional time for God that included fasting along with prayer and reading His Word?

Brother and sisters, let's grow in practicing this neglected discipline, relying in the Holy Spirit help. I want to encourage all of us today, let's grow in our prayer life, let's grow in our Bible intake, let's grow in our practice of fasting, let's grow in being like Christ.

Please let's pray...

Sermon 5

Dionardo Medina

Sermon Series: Biblical Discipleship

Sermon Title: *Christlikeness in Spirit-dependent Obedience*

Text: John 15:8-12

Place: Grace Fellowship Church, Hazleton, PA

Date: Sunday - 09/11/2022. AM Worship Service

Please open your Bibles and let's read together from John 15:8-12...

John 15:8-12

⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Let's please pray together to our God now: Dear heavenly Father...

Introduction

Again, we have seen that **Discipleship** is "the process of learning the teachings of Jesus and following after his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit."⁷⁸ Discipleship also involves the process of **making other disciples** through the equipping of one another in the truth of the Word. We have seen that the aim or purpose of discipleship is **Christlikeness**, "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29).

We talked about Christlikeness in The Spiritual Discipline of Prayer. We saw how Christ was a man of prayer, and His disciples are expected to imitate him and be people of prayer too, equipping, and encouraging one another for the growth in our prayer life both personally and corporately as Christ's body. As disciples of Christ we are people who prayed like Jesus, we pray for one another, and we help and equip one another into growing in our prayer life. I ask God that if anyone of us have been neglecting our prayer devotions, that God's helps us to pray more and do it in a biblical manner as taught by our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁷⁸ Byrley, "Discipleship."

We talked about Christlikeness in the Spiritual Discipline of Bible Intake. Our Lord Jesus Christ was a man devoted to reading, studying, meditating and memorizing Scripture since a young age, and we as disciples of Christ are expected to imitate Christ in the way that he was devoted to Holy Scripture. We saw that we need to be lovers of the Word of God, doers of the Word of God, making every effort in diligently living according to what is stated in the Word of GOD, not relying in our strength, but IN CHRIST, who has *“granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence. (2 Peter 1:3).*

Most recently, last week, we learned Christlikeness in the Spiritual Discipline of Fasting, pointing out that Our Lord Jesus Christ did Fast. Christ did teach us to fast and expects us to do so, and Fasting done with a biblical purpose. The congregation was challenged during last sermon to fast and pray one day a week for the next 3 weeks (3 days) with the purpose of 1st, salvation for no Christian families of our church members (spouses and children), 2nd, asking God to help us into growing toward Christlikeness; and 3rd, victory over specific sins we might be struggling with, for strength in temptations and trials.

Today we moved toward another aspect of discipleship. Disciples of Christ imitates Him in the pursuit of obedience. The subject for today is **Christlikeness in Spirit-Dependent Obedience**. A central aspect of discipleship is Christlikeness in obedience to Jesus commandments, along with encouraging, helping and equipping others in the same in our fellowship with each other.

In Matthew 28:19-20, we can see how pursuing the observance of Christ commandments is a very important aspect of being a disciple of Jesus. **Matthew 28:19-20** *“**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,** ²⁰**teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.** And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*

You see brothers and sisters, an important aspect of growing into being a disciple of Christ, an important aspect of making disciples for Christ is the observance, the obedience, of all that Jesus Christ has commanded us. Christlikeness in Spirit-Dependent obedience.

In our Grace Fellowship Church New Member Class Manual, Lesson 2, point D of that lesson, we see major themes of reformed theology taught at GFC, including salvation by grace through faith alone (we cannot and will not save ourselves) as clearly stated in Ephesians 2:1-20 and Titus 3:3-8, and it also includes the doctrine of sanctification (the nature of the Christian life), the fact that salvation by grace results in fruit of salvation, in obedience and growth in grace.

1 John 2:3-6

³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.

⁴ Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,

⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:

⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

In our 1689 Confession of Faith Chapter 13, paragraph 1, 2 and 3 says the following:

PARAGRAPH 1.

They who are united to Christ, effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart and a new spirit created in them through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection, are also farther sanctified, really and personally, through the same virtue, by his Word and Spirit dwelling in them; the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts of it are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of all true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

PARAGRAPH 2

This sanctification is throughout the whole man, yet imperfect in this life; there abides still some remnants of corruption in every part, where from arises a continual and irreconcilable war; the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh.

PARAGRAPH 3

In which war, although the remaining corruption for a time may much prevail, yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome; and so the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God, pressing after a heavenly life, in evangelical obedience **to all the commands which Christ as Head and King, in his Word has prescribed to them.**

Few verses supporting this statement of the Confession:

Romans 6:5-6

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.⁶ We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.

Hebrews 12:14

14 Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

2 Corinthians 7:1

Since we have these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.**

Brothers and sisters, these are just few examples on how Scripture encourage us to grow into obedience to Jesus Commandments in the context of abiding in Christ, and again, Christ Himself instructed into this, **“teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you”**.

Let's go now go over three main points after this introduction:

1. Christ obeyed perfectly.
2. Disciples grow in the fruit obedience through abiding in Christ in the Spirit.
3. Abiding in Christ's Love.

Point #1. Christ Obeyed Perfectly

Christ obeyed perfectly.

Philippians 2:8

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of **death**, even death on a cross.”

2 Corinthians 5:21

“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

No one apart from Christ have obeyed perfectly. This is actually a task that is impossible by any man or woman in our current nature, until we attain glorification of our bodies.

Romans 3:23

“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

It is only through Christ perfect work of obedience and redemptive sacrifice for our sins that we are saved.

Our trust for our salvation does not rely in our obedience, we are saved by faith in the work of Christ alone.

Romans 3:20-22

“20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law...

22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.”

Romans 5:19

For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

1 Corinthians 1:29-31

“29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

30 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

31 so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Although we cannot obey perfectly like Christ while in this nature, we as disciples of Christ do grow in obedience in the context of our faith and union with Him. Those

elected, called, and saved by God, those who are disciples of Christ, are commanded to grow in imitating Christ's obedience, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20). Disciples grow in obedience, not perfectly but progressively, as the Holy Spirit works, transforming their lives toward the image of the Son. Moreover, those that are in Christ are known by their fruit. Martin Luther pointed out "the works of faith do not make faith, but faith does the works of faith."⁷⁹

Matthew 7:16-18

16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.

18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.

Christ expects His disciples to grow in Spirit-dependent obedience to God's commandments, not in a legalistic way to earn salvation as it is not by works (Eph 2:8-9), but as a demonstration of their love for Him, showing the fruit evidencing that indeed they are in Christ.

Point #2. Disciples Grow in the Fruit Obedience through Abiding in Christ

Those that truly abide in Christ bear fruit: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (John 15:4). Regarding this verse, Gerald Borchert indicates,

Just as the Father abides/dwells in Jesus (14:10) and the Paraclete [Holy Spirit] would abide in them (14:17), so they are commanded as his disciples to abide in the Vine. . . . A branch is not a self-contained entity, and neither is the Christian disciple. And as a branch separated from the supply of nourishment cannot produce fruit, neither can the Christian. Fruit bearing for the disciple is totally dependent on a direct connection to Jesus. Attachment to Jesus or abiding in him is, therefore, the sine quo non of Christian discipleship.⁸⁰

The Sine quo non means "an essential condition, a thing that is absolutely necessary". So, in other words, attachment to Jesus or abiding in Him by faith is an essential condition, absolutely necessary for bearing fruit of obedience in Christian discipleship.

John Calvin clearly indicated how the empowerment from the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer is the only reason for which believers are able to be obedient to the law of God and grow in conformation into the character of Jesus, Calvin wrote "by this power we are drawn and inflamed, knowingly and willingly, to obey him, yet also more vitally and more effectively than by mere human willing or knowing!"⁸¹

⁷⁹ Towns, "Martin Luther on Sanctification," 118.

⁸⁰ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, The New American Commentary, vol. 25B (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002), 142.

⁸¹ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:80.

John Owen, in his work *The Mortification of Sin*, encourage believer to seek obedience relying in God's "supply of grace,"⁸² not in our strength as "we cannot do it by ourselves".⁸³ Owen wrote "Christ is the fountain from which the new man must draw the influences of life and strength... Only Christ and the means appointed by Him will give you lasting help."⁸⁴

That is exactly what we see in John 15. We are able to obey only through abiding in Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's read verses 8-12 again:

⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

⁹ As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

Brothers and sisters, verse 8 tells us that the Father is glorified when we bear fruits as Christ's disciples. Our obedience glorifies God. Our obedience glorifies God. God created humans to be image bearers (Gen 1:27) for his glory (Isa 43:7), and these two realities are manifested in those that are genuine disciples: "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples" (John 15:8). The Greek word καρπὸν (*karpon*) translated as "fruit" (literally or figuratively) is associated with "actions of men,"⁸⁵ and in the context of John 15, the disciple's bearing of fruit is contingent upon fellowship and union with Christ, "apart from me you can do nothing" says the Lord in verse 15:4.

Disciples glorify God by practicing Holy-Spirit dependent obedience, reflecting His image by their fruit, while being conformed in the likeness of Jesus, and in that way demonstrating that they are in Christ.

George Beasley-Murray points out that "in such fruit bearing the Father is glorified in the believer, as he is in the Son in his redemptive work (John 12:23, 28, 31-32; 13:31-32; 17:1), and so doing the believer becomes a true follower of his Lord—a disciple."⁸⁶

⁸² Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:121

⁸³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:121.

⁸⁴ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1:121.

⁸⁵ Friedrich Hauck, "Καρπός, Ἄκαρπος, Καρποφορέω," in Kittel, Bromiley, and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 614.

⁸⁶ George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 36 (Dallas: Word, 1999), 273.

Borchert points out, “it is because they [disciples] abide in Jesus, the Vine, and are obedient to Him in the bearing of fruit that they bring glory to the Father.”⁸⁷

Glorifying God by bearing fruit is another purpose of discipleship—doing so “not only indicates that the followers are true disciples (*mathētai*) of Jesus but also that God is glorified in their discipleship.”⁸⁸

A relevant question believers have to ask is whether their “lives honor and magnify the Father, or whether they are a reproach to Him. An unfruitful branch is a dishonor to God.”⁸⁹

James Inglis states “the fruit is *Christlike* affections, dispositions, graces, as well as the works in which they are displayed.”⁹⁰ Fruit can also be understood as “the manifest evidence one may expect from a life in which the Spirit of God is living and reigning.”⁹¹

A disciple that manifests in his/her life the fruit of love, joy, peace, patient, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23), honors and glorifies God through his/her obedience and proves to be a truly and genuine follower of Christ. “The glory of His blessed attributes shines forth before the eyes of men and of angels.”⁹²

In verse 9, Christ expressed this for His disciples: “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you” and then He encouraged them “abide in my love.” Only by abiding in Christ’s love are disciples able to bear fruit, as it does not come from one’s own strength, but from God’s power.

John Calvin comments, “When in this passage Christ exhorts us to persevere [to abide], we must not rely on our own efforts and battles, but must pray to him who commands us in order to confirm us in his love.”⁹³

In Verse 11 Jesus connects abiding in his love with having his joy: “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (v. 11). The joy

⁸⁷ Borchert, *John 12-21*, 146.

⁸⁸ Borchert, *John 12-21*, 146.

⁸⁹ Arthur Walkington Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John* (Swengel, PA: Bible Truth, 1923), 826.

⁹⁰ Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, 827.

⁹¹ Wesley L. Gerig, “Fruit of the Spirit,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 818.

⁹² R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 1042.

⁹³ John Calvin, *John*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), Jn 15:9, Logos.

of a genuine disciples does not come from anything of this world; it is a fruit of the Spirit that depends on the believer's fellowship with Christ in abiding in Him.

Colin Kruse comments, "While obedience is demanding, it is the pathway of true joy. . . . Jesus' joy came from doing the Father's will, and the joy of disciples will come from doing what Jesus commands them."⁹⁴ This joy also does not signify that believers would not have struggles and tribulations in this world; rather, that "the ground for 'joy' will be far greater, so that no fear, no anxiety, no grief will ever swallow them up. Neither life nor death nor any miseries will stop people from triumphing over sadness if they have been allowed to glory in Christ."⁹⁵

In verse 10 Jesus specified how abiding in Christ's love is also directly related to obeying his commandments: "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love" (John 15:10).

Leon Morris points out, "It is simple obedience. It is when we keep Christ's commandments that we abide in his love. Once again appeal is made to Christ's own example. He kept the Father's commandments and thus abides continually in the Father's love."⁹⁶

John Owen in his Work *The Communion with God*, noticed how the believer obedience to Christ flows out of gratitude and love toward him, as they reflect on the great grace and benefits received from him, after reflecting on all the goodness of Christ, Owen then asked "In view, then, of all Christ's goodness to us, what is our duty to him?"⁹⁷, to which he answered "Our first duty to Christ is to practice holiness in the power of the Spirit. . . . Believers obey Christ as the author of their faith and obedience,"⁹⁸ and furthermore, "in all their obedience, saints have a special regard to their dear Lord Jesus. He is continually in their thoughts. His love to them, his life to them, his death for them, all his mercy and all his kindness constrains them to live to him."⁹⁹

Brothers and sisters, to grow in obedience to God, should not be done out of obligation, or out of legalism or out of moralism, but true and genuine disciples obey and follow Christ motivated by love and gratitude to him.

⁹⁴ Colin G. Kruse, *John*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 4 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 316.

⁹⁵ Calvin, *John*, Jn 15:11.

⁹⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1995), 597.

⁹⁷ John Owen, *Communion with God* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1991), 116-17.

⁹⁸ Owen, *Communion with God*, 117.

⁹⁹ Owen, *Communion with God*, 117.

In Verse 12 we see that abiding in Christ also needs to be manifested in the way his disciples relate to one another. Those who are in Christ, those that abide In Christ practices love for one another: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12), and “these things I command you, so that you will love one another” (John 15:17). Morris cites Augustine’s, saying, “Love, and do what thou wilt,” commenting that this “is a clear expression of what Jesus is teaching here. If we love, in the sense in which Jesus uses the term, we need no other rule.”¹⁰⁰

Brothers and sisters, practicing sacrificial love for one another, investing our time and resources in one another, being aware and receptive of the necessities of one another, of the areas in which our brothers or sisters needs help, or encouragement in their journey of growth toward Christlikeness, is what discipleship is all about. If we love one another, we want our brothers and sisters to grow in holiness, Christlikeness and sanctification, and consequently I will do my part in the equipping of my brother or sister in Christ.

With this Let’s go now to point #3.

Point #3. Abiding in Christ’s Love

When Christ’s disciples practice love for one another, they do that through Abiding in Christ Love as we saw in verse 9, acting out their new identity and reality as they abide in Christ and they interact in relationship to one another.

It is because of the fact that disciples are united with Christ by abiding in Christ love that the disciples are able to obey God in the commandments of love.

Without union with Christ, without abiding in Christ, no one will be able to practice Mark 12:29-31. Again “apart from me you can do nothing” the Lord’s says. Apart from our faith in Christ alone, who makes us able, apart from Christ we can do nothing. Only by abiding in Christ’s love we can obey the Great Commandment.

Mark 12:28b-31

²⁸ ... “Which commandment is the most important of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. ³⁰ And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Obeying these Great Commandment of loving God and others, Christlikeness in this for God’s glory is only possible through abiding in Christ’s love, by faith in Him. Jesus taught His followers that these were the most important commandments of all, upon which “depend all the law and the prophets” (Matt 22:40).

This teaching of Jesus here in Mark 12:28-31 was the providential result in the context of scribes asking Jesus what he considered to be more relevant in the law, as “there was in

¹⁰⁰ Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 598.

early Judaism a great deal of dispute about how to rank the 613 commandments (248 positive commands, 365 prohibitions) in the Hebrew Scriptures in terms of importance, and even more debate as to which one was the most crucial or paramount of these commandments, which then could be used as a hermeneutical tool to interpret the rest.”¹⁰¹

The scribes questioned Jesus about it and he answered, “The Most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31). Christ quotes here Deuteronomy 6:4-5, known by the Israelites as the *Shema* (which is the Hebrew word ‘to hear’), that was “recited morning and evening by every pious Jews.”¹⁰²

“And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (v. 30). The word “all” before each element indicates that God should be loved intentionally and with complete devotion.

Deuteronomy 6:5 mentions only three words “heart,” “soul,” and “might,” and Jesus in verse Mark 12:30 also adds “mind.” The three Hebrew words לֵבָב (*lebab*) for “heart,” נֶפֶשׁ (*nephesh*) “soul,” and מְעוֹד (*meod*) “might or strength,” all together “represent the sum of the powers which belong to the composite life of man . . . the ‘heart’ being in the psychology of the ancient Hebrews the organ of intellect, and the ‘soul’ of the desires and affections.”¹⁰³

In requesting love with all of these elements “God lays rightful claim to every facet of human personality,”¹⁰⁴ including emotions, spirit, intelligence, and will.

Loving God and others in this way cannot be done in a legalistic manner, as those who love God this way are only able to do so because of a divine work in their life. They must first be recipients of a new heart (Ezek 36:26-27) and receive a new birth in Christ (John 3:3) through the power of the Holy Spirit (Titus 3:5). In other words, IN ORDER TO LOVE GOD LIKE THIS WE NEED TO ABIDE IN CHRIST’S LOVE.

William Lane points out, “To love God in the way defined by the great commandment is to seek God for his own sake, to have pleasure in him and to strive impulsively after him. Jesus demands a decision and readiness for God, and for God alone, in an unconditional

¹⁰¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2001), 330.

¹⁰² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 371.

¹⁰³ Henry Barclay Swete, ed., *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, Classic Commentaries on the Greek New Testament (London: MacMillan, 1898), 284-85.

¹⁰⁴ Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, 371.

manner. Clearly this cannot be the subject of legal enactment. It is a matter of the will and action.”¹⁰⁵

Jesus then tells the disciples the second great commandment, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:31), quoting Leviticus 19:18, AND something that is crucial in practicing discipleship, as “a whole-hearted love for God necessarily finds its expression in a selfless concern for another man which decides and acts in a manner consistent with itself.”¹⁰⁶ R. Alan Cole points out,

The heart of true religion is seen to lie, not in negative commands, but in a positive loving attitude to God and others. This is the Pauline “liberty” of the New Testament (Gal. 5:1). This is what Augustine means by saying “Love and do as you like,” for such love towards God and others will in itself keep us from licence. If we love others, we will do nothing to work them hurt and, if we love God, what we like and choose will be to do God’s will and pleasure (Ps. 40:8). That is why Paul can say “love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom. 13:10).¹⁰⁷

Conclusion and Final Words of Application

Brothers and sisters, Disciples of Christ grow in holiness and obedience. Christ disciples overcome and have victory over sin, because they abide in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Romans 6:12-14

¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

I encourage you to examine your life, see what are you doing that is not pleasing to God, ask God to help you in your battle with sins. Our obedience to the commands of God is a prove that we love God, as we reject insisting in our own ways, and instead we pursue the ways of God in our life (1st Corinthian 13:5). Consequently, obeying God’s commands is a practical way of loving and glorifying God. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ stated how loving God with all heart, soul, mind and strength, is the most important commandment, followed by loving others as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). A first major aspect of Christian discipleship is *practicing* this love in obedience to his Word. We grow in obedience, and we encourage and invest in one another in helping to grow in obedience too.

¹⁰⁵ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 432-33.

¹⁰⁶ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 433.

¹⁰⁷ R. Alan Cole, *Mark*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 272-73.

Genuine disciples received the strength to practice love and obedience to God because of the fact that we abide in Christ. It is so good to know that our abiding in Christ is a reality that does not depend on how we feel. Nothing can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:35-39). God's presence is always in us (John 14:17-18), even though we do not realize it sometimes because of struggles. Our strength to obey and to love Him comes from the fact that we abide in Christ and the Holy Spirit is in us.

John 14:17

“even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”

I encourage you to examine God's Word and live accordingly to God's Will, I encourage you to pray for God's will to be done in your life, abiding in Him in Spirit-dependence obedience. This requires an active and intentional participation from our part. Receiving the Word of God, praying the Word of God, and obeying the Word of God are the ways in which we abide in Christ.

Brothers and sisters, let's grow in Christlikeness in obedience, and let's help and equip and invest in one another as we all pursue imitating Christ in holiness and sanctification.

Let's pray...

Sermon 6

Dionardo Medina.

Sermon Series: Biblical Discipleship

Sermon Title: Christlikeness in Reaching the Lost in Evangelism.

Text: Matthew 28:19-20

Place: Grace Fellowship Church, Hazleton, PA

Date: Sunday - 09/18/2022. AM Worship Service

Please open your Bible and let's read together from Matthew 28:19-20

Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Let's please pray together to our God now: Dear heavenly Father...

Introduction

We have defined **Discipleship** as “the process of learning the teachings of Jesus and following after his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit,”¹⁰⁸ and helping, encouraging and equipping one another in the same. We have also seen that Discipleship also involves the process of **making other disciples**, which is that we will mostly focus today in this sermon.

We have seen that the aim or purpose of discipleship is **Christlikeness**, “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29).

We talked about Christlikeness in The Spiritual Discipline of Prayer. We saw how Christ was a man of prayer, and we as His disciples are expected to imitate him in our prayer life.

We talked about Christlikeness in the Spiritual Discipline of Bible Intake. Our Lord Jesus Christ was a man devoted to reading, studying, meditating and memorizing Scripture since a young age, and we as disciples of Christ are expected to imitate Christ in the same way that He was devoted to Holy Scripture. We saw that we need to be lovers of the Word of God, doers of the Word of God, making every effort in diligently living according to what is stated in the Word of GOD, not relying in our strength, but IN CHRIST, who has “*granted us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence. (2 Peter 1:3).*”

We also were reminded of the subject of Christlikeness in the Spiritual Discipline of Fasting. The congregation was challenged two weeks ago to fast and pray one day per

¹⁰⁸ Byrley, “Discipleship.”

week for 3 weeks (for a total of 3 days) with the purpose of 1st, salvation for no Christian families of our church members (spouses, children and others), 2nd, asking God to help us in growing toward Christlikeness; and 3rd, victory over specific sins we might be struggling with, for strength in temptations and trials. If you have been doing it, one more day this week to go and finish this challenge

Most recently last week we moved toward another aspect of discipleship. Christlikeness in Spirit-Dependent Obedience and we were reminded of the fact that Disciples of Christ imitates Him in the pursue of obedience as we ABIDE in Christ... as we ABIDE IN CHRIST.

⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. **(John 15:8,10).**

The subject for today deals with another aspect of being a disciple of Christ, **Christlikeness in Reaching the Lost in Evangelism, Christlikeness in Reaching the Lost in Evangelism.**

In a survey, 1600 Christians were asked the following questions: How important is it that you share your faith with others? How often do you talk about spiritual matters with people that might not share your beliefs? Only between 4 to 17% of them (depending on their ages) shared the gospel regularly with unbelievers.¹⁰⁹

Of the ones who didn't, among the reasons for not doing it, the following were some of the answers given by them: many says fear kept them from sharing the gospel (including fear of rejections by others for sharing their faith, and fear of hostility for sharing their faith), others said they didn't have many opportunities to share the gospel, others said they didn't feel equipped to share the gospel, some said their reason was that most people were not interested in their faith, some said they were too busy, some said they were too shy, some said they couldn't find an appropriate time to share their faith, some said they didn't find it easy to bring up faith, some said they didn't want to come across as pushy for sharing their faith, some said they didn't want to offend others by sharing their faith. As you can see, so many reasons were given as an excuse by the majority of these professed Christians for not sharing the Gospel.

Sadly, the Great Commission have been greatly neglected by many Christians in our times. This is an unfortunate reality for many in the church of today that needs to change.

Brothers and sisters, a couple of questions for us to reflect upon. When was the last time that you shared the good news of the gospel of Christ with a lost soul? Has any of these excuses already mentioned prevented you to do so?

¹⁰⁹ Jesus Film Project, "We Asked 1,600+ Christians Why They Don't Share Their Faith," July 23, 2020, <https://www.jesusfilm.org/blog/christian-evangelism-statistics/>.

Before we go any further, it is important to make sure we are clear in the essentials of what evangelism is and what it implies. The most important element of evangelism is understanding the Gospel or Good News (evangel). I found that Mark Dever made one of the best summaries I have read so far regarding the essentials of evangelism that all of us Christians needs to know when doing evangelism. What it is that we are telling the unbelievers regarding the Good News of the Gospel? Dever points out “if we are not getting the evangel right [IF WE ARE NOT GETTING THE GOSPEL RIGHT] if we’re not getting the evangel right according to the Word, then whatever we’re doing, it can’t be called evangelism. So what are the essentials of evangelism?”

Dever says “we can sum them up in four words: God, man, Christ and response. [the first word is God] *God* is our holy Creator and righteous Judge. He created us to glorify him and enjoy him forever (Gen. 2:7, 16-17; 18:25; Matt. 25:31-33). [the second word is man] But *mankind* has rebelled against God by sinning against His holy character and law (Gen. 3:1-7). We have all participated in this sinful rebellion, both in Adam as our representative head and in our own individual actions (1 Kings 8:46; Rom. 3:23; 5:12, 19; Eph. 2:1-3). As a result, we have alienated ourselves from God and have exposed ourselves to His righteous wrath, which will banish us eternally to hell if we are not forgiven (Eph. 2:12; John 3:36; Rom. 1:18; Matt. 13:50). [The third word if Christ] But God sent Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, to die the death that we deserved for our sins—the righteous for the unrighteous—so that God might both punish our sin in Christ and forgive it in us (John 1:14; Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6-8; Eph. 2:4-6). [the forth word is Response] The only saving response to this good news is repentance and belief (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 3:7-9; John 20:31). We must repent of our sins (turn from them and to God) and believe in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation to God.

God, man, Christ, response. Remember—it’s not evangelism without the evangel.”¹¹⁰ It’s not evangelism without the gospel.

Luke 3:8-9

⁸ Bear fruits in keeping with repentance...

⁹ Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.”

John 20:31

³¹ but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

I would like us to go through two main points after this introduction:

4. First, Christ came for an evangelistic mission – to save many lost and make disciples of them.
5. Second, the same mission was given to us. Missional discipleship. Imitating Christ in His love for the Lost and in sharing of His Gospel.

¹¹⁰ Mark Dever and Paul Alexander, *How to Build a Healthy Church: A Practical Guide for Deliberate Leadership* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 64.

Point #1. Christ Came for an evangelistic mission.

Christ came to save lost people. We read in Luke 19:9-10

⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house...

¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Christ came to save sinners. We read in Mark 2:13-17

¹³ He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to him, and he was teaching them.

¹⁴ And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him.

¹⁵ And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

¹⁶ And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

¹⁷ And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

“those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick” (Mark 2:17).

This reality is clearly visualized in the Gospels. Christ came to proclaim good news of salvation in Him. We also read in Luke 4:16-21:

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read.

¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written,

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

All of these verses in Scripture tells us about the evangelistic nature of the coming of Christ to the world. There is no salvation for sinners apart from the missionary work of our Lord Jesus Christ for us. The apostle Paul was also clear in that evangelistic mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, that's why he said in 1 Timothy 1:12-15:

¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service,

¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,

¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Christ came into this world to save the apostle Paul, to save you, to save me, to save sinners like us, because of the fact that He loves us, so He came with this mission of saving us through His sufferings and death for our sins. We read in Ephesians 5:1-2

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Christ also expected His disciples to continue proclaiming the good news so that those who are spiritually blind can see the truth, as the Holy Spirit convicts them through the preaching of the gospel. With this we are going now to point #2.

Point #2. The Same Mission is Given to us. Missional Discipleship. Imitating Christ in His Love for the Lost in Evangelism.

We have seen that Christ came for an evangelistic mission to save the lost, and in the same way Christ's disciples, you and me, us, we have the mission of proclaiming salvation to the Lost, salvation in Christ alone, we have the mission of proclaiming the gospel of Christ. We as disciples of Christ have a great commission given by our Master. That is what we see in Matthew 28:19-20.

We see in the book of Acts how the early church embraced its Great Commission of reaching the lost. These early Christians knew that as disciples of Christ they needed to talk to the lost about the Gospel for salvation of people souls. The acceptance of that responsibility by Christians was a very important factor in the great outreach and expansion in the early church. Edward Gibbon wrote that in the early church "it became the most sacred duty of a new convert to diffuse among his friends and relations the inestimable blessing which he had received."¹¹¹ They knew that another important aspect

¹¹¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive & Readable Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 651.

of their purpose on earth was working for the advancement of the kingdom of God through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ by all Christ's believers.

They preached the gospel to people around them, a task that was not always easy to do, but regardless of hardships and opposition, they were faithful in fulfilling what they were instructed to do. They knew they were “divinely called and divinely sent.”¹¹²

Adolf Harnack, a church historian, pointed out that “the most numerous and successful missionaries of the Christian religion were not the regular teachers but Christians themselves, in virtue of their loyalty and courage.... It was characteristic of this religion that everyone who seriously confessed the faith proved of service to its [proclamation].... We cannot hesitate to believe that the great mission of Christianity was accomplished by means of informal missionaries.”¹¹³ Christians share the good news of the gospel with the fallen world because Christ did it, and because Christ also wants us to continue His mission.

Just before His ascension Jesus instructed them to make disciples in the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples to all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:19-29). All that are in Christ have the command to preach the gospel, reaching the lost with His message.

The Holy Spirit uses the preaching of the Gospel to convict His chosen people of sins, to bring them into repentance, into becoming disciples of Christ, and then the process continues to replicate in each new disciple who also embrace the Great Commission. Jesus tells them to go to “all nations,” as salvation is not only to the Israelites but it includes the Gentiles. “Jesus’ ministry in Israel was the beginning point of a universal offer of salvation to all the peoples of the earth.”¹¹⁴

Jesus then instructs his followers that disciples must be baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, an act that associates the new believer with the triune God. All believers who have received the gift of salvation by grace are baptized after repentance and confession of faith in Christ (Acts 2:38, 2:41), and this outward sign serves as a sign of fellowship with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:3-5; Col 2:12; Gal 3:27).

Romans 6:3-5

³ Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?

¹¹² Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church, Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 140.

¹¹³ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 651.

¹¹⁴ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 953.

⁴ We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

⁵ For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

Baptism is also a sign of the cleansing and remission of sin that has already happened spiritually in those who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ alone (Acts 22:16; Ezek 36:25; Acts 2:38; Mark 1:4; Acts 22:16). Regarding baptism, R. C. Sproul comments,

Baptism communicates that we have been united to Jesus Christ. It shows that we have been cleansed from sin, regenerated by the Holy Spirit, and buried and raised again with Jesus Christ, just to mention few of its significations. God promises that all who have faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, will participate in all of the promise, all of the benefits, that Christ has secured. Baptism is not a sign of one's faith; it is a sign of the faithfulness of God to give all of His Son to all who believe.¹¹⁵

In the next portion of this passage Jesus speaks of teaching to His followers: "Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (v. 20a). It is clear here that Jesus expects his disciples to obey his teachings and to teach others to obey as well. Craig Blomberg comments, "Teaching obedience to all of Jesus' commands forms the heart of disciple making. Evangelism must be holistic... If new converts are not faithfully and lovingly nurtured in the whole counsel of God's revelation, then the church has disobeyed the other part."¹¹⁶

Making disciples, growing into the likeness of Jesus, is a Holy Spirit dependent process that should continue throughout one's life, "making disciples involves: 'baptizing' them and 'teaching' them obedience to all of Jesus' commandments. The first of these will be a once-for-all, decisive initiation into Christian community. The second proves a perennially incomplete, life-long task."¹¹⁷ This life-long mission is of crucial importance for each local church. "It is the particular responsibility of the church to hand on that teaching and to see to it that new disciples make it their way of life."¹¹⁸

A church that fails to teach its members and encourage Spirit-dependent obedience to the commandments of Jesus is a church that is failing its most important task and responsibility in discipleship. "Christian churches are only Christian if they center on Christ's commands"¹¹⁹ and preach Christ from all Scripture.

¹¹⁵ R. C. Sproul, *Matthew*, St. Andrew's Expository Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 826.

¹¹⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 432.

¹¹⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

¹¹⁸ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 888.

¹¹⁹ O'Donnell, *Matthew*, 917.

Christ-centered preaching for the purpose of growing into being like Him in obedience, and encouraging other disciples to grow is key in our discipleship journey.

Ulrich Zwingli, one of the reformers, once proclaimed, “you are God’s tool. He wills to wear you out by use, not by idleness. Oh, happy man, whom He calls to His work!”¹²⁰ Indeed, God is willing to use His disciples as tools in this corrupted world to bring the message of His gospel and through it, save those that He has predestined by His sovereign and perfect will. It is through the proclamation of the gospel that humanity knows the seriousness of their sinful state, and their hopelessness apart from Christ.

Thomas Watson (one of the puritans of the seventeenth century), affirms that those that are of God “strives to be an instrument for making others godly,”¹²¹ and consequently they make an intentional effort for the conversion of souls, “he who loves his captain will persuade others to come under his banner.”¹²² As Christians grow into being like Christ, their love for God, and their love for others also grows, and this ignites in them a desire to make more disciples, preaching the Gospel in evangelism.

The Apostle Peter wrote in 1 Peter 2:9, “but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of the darkness into his marvelous light.”

Witnessing to others the gospel in evangelism is not a work only for missionaries, pastors, leaders, but instead, every Christian is called by God to evangelize, working for the expansion of the kingdom of God. All of you, all of us are a chosen race, chosen to proclaim the excellencies of him who called us.

Again, all believers are called to this mission, learning about Christ and teaching others about Him. Every believer is expected to lovingly, intentionally and diligently make more disciples, it is a task given to all. Jonathan Dodson affirms “Jesus calls each of us into making disciples. This isn’t a mission we stumble into. It requires intentionality. All Christians are sent to make disciples.”¹²³

Many Reformed churches throughout different times of its history, and because of their soteriological theology, have been falsely accused of neglecting the task of evangelism. James Boice narrates an interesting interaction between Professor John H. Gerstner and R. C. Sproul:

Dr. R. C. Sproul was once a student at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary where he took a course from Dr. Gerstner, professor of church history. The professor had given

¹²⁰ Elliot Ritzema, *300 Quotations for Preachers from the Reformation*, Pastorum Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2013).

¹²¹ Watson, *The Godly Man’s Picture*, 183.

¹²² Watson, *The Godly Man’s Picture*, 183.

¹²³ Jonathan K. Dodson, *Gospel Centered Discipleship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 38.

a lecture on predestination and then, as was his custom, began to ask questions of the students. Sproul was seated on one end of a large semicircle. Gerstner began at the other end. He asked, "Now, if predestination is true, why should we be involved in evangelism?" The first student looked back at the professor and said, "I don't know." Gerstner moved on to the next student, who replied, "It beats me." The next seminarian answered, "I am glad you raised that question; I have always wondered about it myself, Dr. Gerstner." ... Sproul was scared to death. Finally, Gerstner came to him and asked, "Well, Mr. Sproul, suppose you tell us. If predestination is true, why should we be involved in evangelism?" Sproul says that he slid down in his seat and began to apologize. "Well, Dr. Gerstner, I know this isn't what you're looking for, and I know that you must be seeking some profound, intellectual response which I am not prepared to give. But just in passing, one small point that I think we ought to notice here is that God commands us to evangelize." [Professor] Gerstner laughed and said, "Yes, Mr. Sproul, God does command us to be involved in evangelism. And, of course, what could be more insignificant than the fact that the Lord of glory, the Saviour of your soul, the Lord God omnipotent, has commanded you to be involved in evangelism?"¹²⁴

Brothers and sisters, the fact that God commanded Christians to evangelize should be the main motivator for believers to act upon it, furthermore, believers that have the fruit of the Spirit of love will feel the urge to bring the message of the gospel to the lost, which will definitely be used by the Holy Spirit to convict His elects of sins and bring salvation to those that have being appointed by God since the eternity past. The job of all believes is to proclaim the Gospel to anyone we can, because we do not know in which person the Holy Spirit will work for salvation. We do what we were commanded, and we leave the rest to the Lord.

Conclusion and Final Words of Application

We have seen 2 main points.

1. Christ came for an evangelistic mission – to save many lost and make disciples of them.
2. The same mission was given to us. Missional discipleship. Imitating Christ in his love for the Lost. He passed his mission to his disciples, we are called to point people to Jesus as the only way for salvation of their souls. All of us are called to obey this task.

Now I want to encourage you to act accordingly as instructed by our Lord Jesus Christ in the Great Commission. Be a disciple of Christ who share His Gospel with people who desperately needs it. You don't know who will response to the message, this depends on our God, but our task is to preach about Christ as much as we can to the unbelievers that we have the opportunity to. What a privilege it is to be an instrument of God for the salvation of His chosen people for His glory. What a privilege brothers and sisters, what a privilege. We read in **Romans 10:14-17 the following:**

¹²⁴ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, 652-53.

¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? *[BROTHERS AND SISTERS, ALL OF US ARE SENT, WHEREVER GOD HAS PLACED US, WE ARE CALLED AND COMMISSIONED BY OUR LORD JESUS TO SHARE HIS GOSPEL WITH THE LOST, WHEREVER YOU ARE, THEY ARE SOULS THAT NEEDS TO HEAR THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST]* And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

And in verse 17...

¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Brothers and sister, let's preach to the lost people so they hear the Word of God through us. we are called to preached the Gospel to people, and also to pray for people to be saved.

1 Timothy 2:1,3-4

¹ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people,

³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,

⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

We pray for the unbelievers, we preach to them the gospel, and we also show them the gospel with our way of life and actions. Preaching with our actions too. Regarding this, Ignatius of Antioch gave instructions to the Christians of the second century, something that also applies to us today. He said:

...pray without ceasing in behalf of other men. For there is in them hope of repentance that they may attain to God. See, then, that they be instructed by your works, if in no other way. Be meek in response to their wrath, humble in opposition to their boasting: to their blasphemies return your prayers; in contrast to their error, be steadfast in the faith; and for their cruelty, manifest your gentleness. While we

take care not to imitate their conduct, let us be found their brethren in all true kindness; and let us seek to be followers of the Lord.¹²⁵

Let's preach the Gospel to the unbelievers with our Words and with our Actions too.

Finally, I want to challenge you one more time today. Would you join me in the goal of Reaching ONE lost person this week? You can do it with as much people as you want, but at least ONLY ONE is the challenge. I would suggest thinking about an unbeliever you know who needs the Gospel, think about that person today, then PRAY this whole week for that person, and at the same time, look for an opportunity this week to share the GOSPEL with that person, share the gospel with that person, invite that person to church and tell them that you are going to continue to pray for that person. Preach the Gospel of Christ and let God do the rest. Would you accept this challenge? Reach ONE lost soul, pray and proclaim the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to that Person. I hope you all do. I will.

Let's please pray together, Dear Heavenly Father...

¹²⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1 of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885), 53-54.

Sermon 7

Dionardo Medina

Sermon Series: Biblical Discipleship

Sermon Title: Persevering in Christlikeness and Fellowship.

Text: Acts 2:42

Place: Grace Fellowship Church, Hazleton, PA

Date: Sunday - 09/25/2022. AM Worship Service

Please open your Bibles and let's read together from **Acts 2:42**

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Let's please pray together to our God now: Dear heavenly Father...

Introduction / Summary of Prior Lessons

Today we have reached our final week of this Biblical Discipleship series, week number 7. It is pertinent in this final day of this subject to briefly summarize what we have covered so far.

In week number 1 we went through the subject of Discipleship for the Purpose of Christlikeness. **1 Corinthians 11:1** “Be Imitators of me, as I am of Christ. **Ephesians 5:1** “be imitators of God, as beloved children”. **Romans 8:28-29** “And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew *he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son*, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” Those that truly are IN CHRIST will grow into being LIKE CHRIST. CHRISTLIKENESS is God's will and desire for all of us that are His children. Those that belongs to God do not long for the things of this world, but instead replicate the character of Christ in their life and help, encourage and equip others for the same purpose. We do not grow in imitating Christ to earn salvation. We grow in Christlikeness because of the fact that God saved us by His mercy, by His love, by His Grace alone. The God who saves is also the God who sanctifies, as the Holy Spirit produces growth into maturity and Christlikeness in His people, 1 Corinthians 6:11b “...you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” God is working in us, and at the same time Scripture tells us we are not to be passive in the pursue of Christlikeness, instead as 2 Peter 1:5 says “Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue.” As we are making every effort we are not being passive, instead we are doing everything we can in our pursue of Christlikeness in dependency of the Holy Spirit who strengthens and enables us. **2 Peter 1:3-5** “³ *His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,* ⁴ *by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.* ⁵ *For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue.*” We also discussed in week 1 that Discipleship is costly, **Matthew 16:24** “**If anyone**

would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”
Philippians 3:8 **“Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.”**

After week 1, for the following three weeks after that, we talked about how disciples are expected to imitate Christ in the practice of Spiritual Disciplines, and help, encourage and invest in one another for the same purpose.

In week number 2, we covered Christlikeness in the Spiritual Discipline of Prayer. Christ prayed constantly, The God-Man Christ had an intense prayer life that we are expected to imitate too. Christ taught us to Pray. Christ wants us to pray according to God’s will and in His Name. We are all encourage in Scripture to pursue Christlikeness in our prayer life and to help, encourage and invest in one another for the same purpose.

In week number 3, we covered Christlikeness in Bible Intake. Our Lord Jesus Christ, since a young age, had a robust devotion to Scripture intake, reading it daily, studying it, meditating in it, memorizing it, and most importantly living by it. Christ loved and enjoyed Scripture. We are all encouraged in Scripture to pursue Christlikeness in our Bible Intake, in our Devotion to God’s Word in Scripture, and to help, encourage and invest in one another for the same purpose.

In week number 4, we covered the spiritual discipline of fasting, Christlikeness in the Spiritual Discipline of Fasting. Our Lord Jesus Christ Did fast. Our Lord Jesus Christ did teach us and expected His followers to fast, and we also saw how fasting is done with a biblical purpose. During that sermon the congregation was encouraged to fast and pray, for grow in Christlikeness, for our nonbelievers family members and for God’s protection against temptations and spiritual strength in our fight against specifics sins we might individually be dealing with. 1 day per week, 3 days in 3 weeks. We just finished last week of the challenge, but all of us are encouraged by Scripture to continue incorporating this discipline of fasting with prayers in certain times of devotion with God, and with a biblical purpose in mind.

In week number 5, we covered Christlikeness in Spirit-dependent Obedience. We were reminded of the fact that disciples of Christ imitates Him in the pursue of obedience as we ABIDE in Christ. Christ obeyed perfectly, none of us will do that, but we are expected to grow in obedience as we imitate Christ and through His power. John 15:8,10 **“⁸ By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.”** Disciples grow in the fruit of obedience through abiding in Christ in the Spirit, through abiding in Christ’s love. We study the Word of God, we pray the Word of God, we obey the Word of God only through abiding in Christ. At the same time, we do not rely on our obedience for salvation, it would not be enough, instead we rely on the only one who obeyed perfectly for our salvation, we trust and rely in Christ alone, Christ saves those who put their faith in Him and Him alone.

In week number 6, last week, we covered another aspect in Biblical Discipleship, which is multiplication, growing in number, making more disciples. **Christlikeness in**

Reaching the Lost in Evangelism. We are all instruments of God for the advancement of His Kingdom in this earth, as all of us preach the Gospel to the lost around us. The Great Commission is a mission for all the disciples of Jesus Christ, and that's include you and me. Are we reaching the lost with the message of the gospel? Do we intentionally reach the lost in personal evangelism? We are all called to imitate Christ in this mission of reaching those who needs Him. Christ came to save sinners. God uses us to save sinners through the preaching of His Gospel.

“¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Today we finish this biblical discipleship series with the subject of **Persevering in Christlikeness and Fellowship, Persevering in Christlikeness and Fellowship.**

Acts 2:42 “And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

Three points we will go through now:

Point #1 Persevering in Christlikeness in Discipleship.

Point #2 Persevering in Loving Fellowship in Discipleship.

Point #3 Persevering in Investing in one another in Discipleship.

Point #1. Persevering in Christlikeness in Discipleship.

We see in Acts chapter 2 that after the Holy Spirit's manifestation in Pentecost, which marked the official birth of the Christian church, the apostle Peter spoke his first gospel sermon to a crowd in Jerusalem, and after his preaching of the gospel three thousand souls were added that day to the Church. The church was growing and as they started to live life together as fellow disciples of Christ: “They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42).

The first words we see in this text is “and they devoted themselves...” When it says “they”, the text is talking about believer's disciples of Christ, those that became Christians after the preaching of the gospel by the apostles.

The next word is “devoted”. The original Greek word here (προσκατεροῦντες “*proskarterountes*”) translated as “*devoted*” also means “to persist, persevere in, continue steadfast in”. This same word that the English Standard Version translate as “they devoted”, that same Greek Word in the Reina Valera Spanish Version is translated as “perseveraban” which is “they persevered”, so we see how the original Greek points toward the apostle being devoted, persevering, continuing steadfast in, persisting. So when the text says that they devoted themselves, it implies “a steadfast and single-minded devotion [perseverance] to a certain course of action”¹²⁶ and that certain course of action was Christlikeness. They devoted themselves, they persevered in “the apostles' teaching.”

¹²⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996), 47.

I want to make the argument that “the apostle’s teachings” is an indirect way of also referring to “Jesus’s teachings,” because, What was the things that the apostles were teaching to the Church? They were teaching to them what they learned from Jesus. So when the church was devoted to the apostle’s teachings, it implies they were devoted, they were persevering in the teachings and the commandments and the practices of Jesus. Polhill points out: “Just as the apostles had been instructed by Jesus, so they passed along that instruction to the new Christians.”¹²⁷ The apostle’s teachings were the teachings of Jesus. They talk to the new Christians the spiritual disciplines taught by Christ, the teachings of how to live as Christ wants us to live as stated in the sermon of the Mount, the commandments of Christs, his supernatural birth, his miracles and power, His Deity, His death, resurrection, ascension to heavens, the significance of Christ’s death as the only way for the forgiveness of sins through repentance and faith in Him. The apostle’s teachings were the teachings of Jesus. And as the new believers devoted themselves, persevere themselves in the apostles’ teachings, they all were also persevering in the commandments and teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ, consequently, persevering in Christlikeness. Brothers and sisters, we are also called and expected by God to persevere every day in our pursue of imitating Jesus.

In close relationship, in fellowship, the primitive church devoted together to the essential elements of Christian discipleship, of which persevering in the apostle’s teachings (which were Christ’s teachings) was the first essential element. This also included the Christian responsibilities and Spirit-dependent bearing of fruit that Christ expects from His followers. In other words, the disciples in the early church persevered in fellowship to the teachings of Jesus and taught the same to one another in in their practice of discipleship.

Brothers and sisters, genuine disciples of Christ will persevere to the end, and while doing so, grow into Christlikeness.

John 8:31

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." (NIV translation)

So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples (NASB)

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples (ESV).

“If you hold to my teaching, if you continue in My Word, If you abide in My Word, then you are truly my disciples”.

Perseverance in Spirit-dependent obedience to the teachings of Christs is a characteristic of those who are genuine disciples of Christs.

¹²⁷ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 119.

1 John 2:3-6

³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments.

⁴ Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him,

⁵ but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him:

⁶ whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.

It is also important to remember, one more time, we grow in imitating Christ not depending on our own strength, but instead it is God who works in His chosen people to persevere. None of God’s chosen children will be lost. God’s children will surely grow in Christlikeness.

John 10:27-29

²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Philippians 1:6

“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

And **1 Corinthians 1:8** tells us that our Lord Jesus Christ will sustain us to the end.

The second essential element we saw in Acts 2:42 is that they (the disciples) were devoted to the breaking of the bread “which [most likely] refers to the Lord’s Supper . . . probably part of the ordinary fellowship meals as described in 1 Corinthians 11.”¹²⁸ The Lord’s Supper was instituted by Christ himself the night he was arrested, for the perpetual remembrance of his expiatory sacrifice (1 Cor 11:23-26), in celebration of God’s presence and in communion with God and other believers in the church. The bread and wine served as a sign and representation of the body and blood of Christ in his covenantal sacrifice (Luke 22:19). Christ is spiritually present in the church’s celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Consequently, believers enjoy many spiritual blessings through this sacrament, including confirmation of their faith in Christ’s expiatory sacrifice for their salvation, and communion with him and with each other. The third essential element needed in Christian discipleship in their life together, and another expression of their fellowship expressed in Acts 2:42 is “the prayers,” which is “most likely a reference to appointed times of united prayer among the believers. . . . There may also be a secondary

¹²⁸ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 121.

reference to believers' attendance at regular prayer times in the temple,"¹²⁹ so as we have seen, they prayed personally, and they attended regular prayer times during the week to pray in fellowship together. Praying together was an important aspect of the fellowship of Christ's disciples as a church.

Brothers and sisters, disciples persevere in their faith in Christ, disciples persevere in the pursuit of obedience to the teachings of Jesus, disciples persevere in practicing what He practiced, in praying together, disciples persevere in preaching the good news to the lost as He did. Real disciples of Christ keep doing these things, persists in these things, are faithful and loyal in continuing in these things, brothers and sisters, real and genuine disciples of Jesus persevere in imitating Him, persevere in Christlikeness.

With this we go to our next point:

Point #2 Persevering in Loving Fellowship in Discipleship

The Greek work translated as “fellowship” in Acts 2:42 is *κοινωνία* (*koinōnia*), the basic meaning being “association, communion, close relationship.”¹³⁰ As we practice loving fellowship with one another as we served and help and encourage and equip one another, as we do all that we are also imitating Christ. Christ loved His disciples. Christ served His disciples. In the same way, Christ expressed His desire that His followers love one another, help and minister to one another in loving fellowship. Jesus served His disciples as an example and illustration on how we, as disciples of Christs, also are expected to help and serve one another: Christ said “For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you” (John 13:15). Here, Jesus is teaching his disciples that they should serve one another in loving fellowship. As Burge indicates, “Jesus’ sacrifice will be the supreme token of his overwhelming love for the world... Jesus now wants His followers to exemplify that same love to one another. His act of sacrifice cannot be repeated, but His model of self-giving love can become a natural feature of the community that follows him and imitates him (13:14-15).”¹³¹ For example, Jesus washing His disciples’ feet “contained a symbolic message about the need to receive the cleansing made possible by his self-humiliation on the cross,”¹³² but also was a lesson for them that “the ‘greatest’ of Jesus’ disciples needs to be ready to render humble service to the ‘least’ of the disciples when necessary.”¹³³ In Jesus’s high priestly prayer in John 17, he prayed for the unity of his disciples “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. . . . I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world

¹²⁹ Chalmer Ernest Faw, *Acts*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1993), 48.

¹³⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, 119.

¹³¹ Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 371.

¹³² Kruse, *John*, 278.

¹³³ Kruse, *John*, 280.

may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me” (John 17:21, 23). Burge points out that the unity between the Father and the Son

is extended to the disciples... This relationship between believers and the Father and Jesus would be brought about through the ministry of the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, sent to the disciples after Jesus’ return to the Father (John 15:26; 16:7). Because the Holy Spirit comes to dwell within them, the Father and the Son dwell within them also, and they dwell in the Father and the Son (John 14:15-20).¹³⁴

Throughout history, faithful and genuine Christians joined in community together with the purpose of equipping each other and serving each other in loving fellowship, united to one another through their faith in Christ. Justin Martyr, on *The First Apology of Justin*, provides a vivid picture of the unity and the serving of one another that characterized the Christians of the second century, as he wrote, “we... continually remind each other of these things. And the wealthy among us help the needy; and we always keep together; and for all things where with we are supplied, we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ, and through the Holy Ghost.”¹³⁵ When he says “continually remind each other of these things”, he is directly referring to how they constantly talked to one another about the Gospel and the teachings of Jesus Christ, and in this sense, an integral part of their fellowship together, was the encouragement of each other and the counseling of one another in all the instructions they have received from Christ and subsequently the apostles.

Justin Martyr also argued that there was a close unity among the Christian community in the early church, characterized by equipping each other with the Word, praying for each other, sharing meals together, and being watchful for the necessities of one another, with special attention to orphans, widows and those that were suffering with various sickness among them.¹³⁶

Disciple’s unity is needed for the kind of servant and loving fellowship that Christ desires between His disciples. True disciples—those that are united with Christ—are also united to one another, and this unity and love is manifested in the way disciples practice fellowship, by nurturing one another, for the purpose of Godliness, for the purpose of Christlikeness.

John Owen, a puritan of the 17th century, instructed believers of the multiple characteristics that should be present in genuine disciples of Christ, as they practice fellowship in community with other believers. Owen pointed out how believers should pursue loving one another as Christ loved the church,¹³⁷ “maintaining an unremitting care

¹³⁴ Kruse, *John*, 340.

¹³⁵ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, in Roberts, Donaldson, and Coxe *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, 185-86.

¹³⁶ Justin Martyr, *The First Apology of Justin*, 185-86.

¹³⁷ John Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2017), 33.

and effort to preserve unity,”¹³⁸ “engaging in frequent spiritual conversation for edification, according to the measure of their gifts,”¹³⁹ bearing one another burdens,¹⁴⁰ watching one another behavior and correcting one another if needed,¹⁴¹ and also “believers should live in an exemplary way in all holiness and godliness, to the glory of the gospel, the edification of the church, and the conviction of those outside the church.”¹⁴²

Again, this is only possible in the setting of deep relationship and fellowship between disciples. Consequently, believers of today, in order to help each other grow as disciples should diligently and intentionally, cultivate brotherly relationship in loving fellowship with one another.

We saw point #1. Persevering in Christlikeness in Discipleship. We saw point #2, persevering in loving fellowship with one another in discipleship, and now we will go point #3, Persevering in investing in one another in discipleship.

Point #3 Persevering in Investing in one another in Discipleship

Brothers and sisters, there is no way we can effectively do discipleship with one another, that we can effectively equip one another into growing in Christlikeness, IF we do not intentionally, purposefully, lovingly, invest some of our time for this purpose with one another, both in the temple on Sundays at the worship service, and on Wednesdays in our prayer meetings, BUT also every other day as we live in community as Christ’s disciples interacting with one another.

Hebrews 10:24-25

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,
²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

A crucial aspect of practicing discipleship is investing in one another. What are you doing to help your brother grow in Christlikeness? Are we taking the time to pursue one another in discipleship for the purpose of Christlikeness?

I believe this church, both in Spanish and English Ministry, have an opportunity for growth in discipleship involvement with each other, with the purpose of helping one another into Christlikeness. We started what we denominated “Equip Teams” around 11/2021, in which each group (conformed of two, three or four brothers or sisters in

¹³⁸ Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, 43.

¹³⁹ Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, 52.

¹⁴⁰ Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, 60.

¹⁴¹ Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, 85.

¹⁴² Owen, *Duties of Christian Fellowship*, 91.

Christ) commits to meeting at least twice a month, with the purpose of discipling one another and equipping one another for growing into Christlikeness and sanctification. Investing in one another does not have to be done in the context of Equip Teams, it can be done outside of equip team, the equip teams was created just as way to foster a deeper discipleship culture of one-anothering in our church. I want to encourage, especially those that are more mature in Christ, how long have you been a Christian? 5 years, 10 years, 15 years, 20 years? Then you can invest in discipling others that are just starting in their journey toward Christlikeness. You see the point? We need to invest in one another.

Brothers and sisters, disciples of Christ invest in one another for our growth into Christlikeness, for our growth in our imitating of Christ, in prayers together, in Bible meditation together, in fasting together, in encouraging obedience together, even in practicing the Great Commission together with the unbelievers. Brothers and sisters, are you investing in one another for all these purposes? Are we investing in one another for Christlikeness in Discipleship?

Scripture have so many “one anothering” encouraging verses. I want to remind you of some of them in this last day of this discipleship series.

John 13:34

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.

Romans 12:10

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Romans 14:19

So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

Romans 15:14

... instruct one another.

Galatians 5:13

... through love serve one another.

Galatians 6:2

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

Ephesians 4:1-3

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4:32

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Colossians 3:13

bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Ephesians 5:21

submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

1 Peter 5:5

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Philippians 2:4

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Colossians 3:16

16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Hebrews 3:13

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 10:24

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,

1 Peter 4:8-11

⁸ Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

⁹ Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

¹⁰ As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

James 5:16

16 Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.

One my professors, Professor Cheong, during one of the seminary classes said something that I had never meditated on before, and something that I want to share with you today, he said “we cannot fix anybody, we are here to love people, God is the one with fixes people.” This is so true. Practicing discipleship is hard, practicing discipleship is costly, we need to open ourselves to one another, and sometimes this might be uncomfortable, because we still have a fallen nature. We are here to love God, we are here to love

people, we are here to share God's message, and we let God do the fixing as we interact in God's Word with one another.

Conclusion and Final Word of Application

We have covered three main points in this sermon today: persevering in Christlikeness in Discipleship, persevering in Loving Fellowship in Discipleship, persevering in Investing in one another in discipleship.

Brothers and sisters, I encourage you to be more intentional in doing all these things. Would you be more mindful in pursuing your purpose as followers of Christ? Disciples grow in imitating Christ; Disciples equips others in imitating Christ. It is only through a Spirit-dependent and Christ-abiding perseverance in personal discipleship practices and in loving fellowship in discipleship with one another, that we will be able to grow in achieving daily imitation of the character Christ, bearing fruit, helping, assisting, equipping and encouraging one another in the main purpose of biblical discipleship, which is CHRISTLIKENESS. Brother and sisters, I encourage all of you, I encourage all of us, let's persevere in CHRISTLIKENESS.

Let's please Pray...

APPENDIX 3

POST-PROJECT DISCIPLESHIP UNDERSTANDING AND PRACTICE SURVEY (DUPS)

The following survey was used to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of discipleship knowledge and practice among congregants of GFC. This survey was administered after the teaching material was preached in the congregation, and in order to compare and evaluate success of the ministry project.

POST-PROJECT DISCIPLESHIP UNDERSTANDING
AND PRACTICE SURVEY (DUPS)

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding and practice of biblical discipleship by members of Grace Fellowship Church. This research is being conducted by Dionardo Medina for the purpose of completing a ministry project. In this research, you will be asked to answer questions regarding your personal and public discipleship practices and understanding as a follower of Jesus Christ. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Discipleship is “the process of learning the teachings of Jesus and following after his example in obedience through the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹ In addition, discipleship involves the process of making other disciples through teaching and evangelism. The aim of discipleship is Christlikeness, which is the final goal of eternal election, “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29).

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

1. Are you a repented, converted, and a professing believer/Christian? Yes ___ No ___
2. Are you an adult (18 years old or older)? Yes ___ No ___
3. How old are you?
Between 18 to 34 years old _____
Between 35-54 years old _____
Between 55-75 years old _____
More than 75 years old _____
4. How long have you been a believer?
1 to 5 years _____
6- to 10 years _____
11 to 20 years _____
More than 20 years _____

¹ Chris Byrley, “Discipleship,” in *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, ed. Douglas Mangum et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2014), Logos.

**Section 1. Discipleship Understanding
in the Context of Salvation**

- SD - Strongly Disagree
- D - Disagree
- DS - Disagree Somewhat
- AS - Agree Somewhat
- A - Agree
- SA - Strongly Agree

- 5. I am saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ alone.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 6. Salvation is a gift of God and cannot be earned by anything I do.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 7. Because God saved me, I am being conformed into the image of Christ.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 8. I believe that God’s work of sanctification is active in my life.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 9. Since the day God saved me, I have been growing in holiness, obedience, and mortifying sin.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 10. I understand what Jesus meant when he said “by their fruits you will know them” in Matthew 7:20.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 11. I believe God is producing fruits of salvation in me.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

Section 2. The Practice of Spiritual Discipline

- 12. I read my Bible every day.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 13. I am currently following a yearly Bible reading plan.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 14. I meditate every day in a portion of Scripture.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 15. In the last week I have memorized at least one verse from Bible.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 16. I enjoy studying my Bible.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 17. I feel confident in understanding what I read from my Bible.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
- 18. I believe I have a good prayer life.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

19. I pray every day at least once.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
20. I pray every day twice or more times.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
21. Every day I have a dedicated prayer time.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
22. I regularly pray for the will of God to be accomplished in my life.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
23. I regularly pray for God to help me obey His commandments.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
24. I pray asking God for the fruit of the Spirit in my life.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
25. I can explain biblical principles of prayer.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
26. I have practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting in the last month.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
27. I have practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting at least once in the past.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
28. I have never practiced the spiritual discipline of fasting.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
29. I believe fasting is a necessary spiritual discipline.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
30. I can explain biblical principles of fasting.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
31. I believe that praying, reading the Bible, and meditating in Scripture are important disciplines to also practice when fasting.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

Section 3. Obedience to the Word of God

32. I strive to live in obedience to the commandments and moral principles taught by Jesus.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
33. I am familiar with “The Great Commandment” as taught by our Lord Jesus.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
34. My love for God is growing every day.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
35. My love for other people (especially fellow believers) is also growing every day.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

36. I welcome constructive criticism (correction) from fellow believers.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
37. I read the Bible with the purpose of knowing and obeying the commands of God (applying it in my life).
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
38. I regularly ask God in my prayers to help me grow into obedience to His law.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
39. I believe God is glorified when I obey his commandments.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
40. I am currently struggling with sins in my life.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
41. I believe the Holy Spirit helps me in fighting sin.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
42. When I disobey God (when I sin), I immediately repent, and confess my sin and try to overcome it with the help of the Holy Spirit and God' Word.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
43. I believe personal accountability (and confessing sins) to another Christian is important for my spiritual growth.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
44. I know that in Christ all my sins are forgiven.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
45. When I sin against a person I usually ask for forgiveness to that person, with a sincere heart, looking for correction/reconciliation.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
46. When others sins against me, I strive to forgive them.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

Section 4. Fellowship with the People of God

47. I understand the importance of biblical fellowship.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
48. I regularly attend church.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
49. I regularly attend Sunday school.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
50. I regularly attend prayer meetings.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
51. I regularly participate in the Lord's Supper.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

52. I have an accountability Christian brother or sister that I can talk to regarding spiritual issues.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
53. I seek advice from other Christians regarding spiritual issues I am struggling with.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
54. I enjoy worshiping and praying with other believers.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
55. I regularly pray with other Christians.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
56. I desire to visit those I know are sick.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
57. I do visit those I know are sick.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
58. I am intentional in developing fellowship with other Christian believers.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
59. I know the names of most people attending Sunday Services at Grace Fellowship Church.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

Section 5. Disciple-Making Practice

60. I am familiar with “The Great Commission” as taught by our Lord Jesus.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
61. I am aware of my responsibility of making more disciples.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
62. I am currently discipling another believer.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
63. I have or had a person in my life who disciplined me.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
64. I desire to make disciples.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
65. I am capable of training others to be disciples.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
66. I use everyday activities as opportunities to help others grow in Christlikeness.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
67. I am growing in my knowledge of disciple-making.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___
68. I am comfortable sharing my faith with unbelievers.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

69. I know how to share my testimony.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

70. I look for opportunities in my daily life to share my faith.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

71. I pray regularly for the unbelievers.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

72. My neighbors and co-workers know I am a Christian.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

73. All Christians are responsible to play a role in practicing The Great Commission.
SD ___ D ___ DS ___ AS ___ A ___ SA ___

Personal Identification #: _____
(Please use this the same number when survey repeated at the end of the sermon series).

Gender: Male _____ Female _____

Date: _____

In what ways, if any, was these biblical discipleship teachings helpful to you? Do you intend to do any changes in the way you practice personal discipleship toward Christlikeness? Are you more motivated to practice the Great Commission more intentionally? Please elaborate.

Is there anything else that you would have liked to be taught regarding discipleship that you think was not cover in this series? Please elaborate if any.

APPENDIX 4
CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following rubric was used to evaluate the discipleship curriculum and was distributed to the select expert panel described in the project methodology section of chapter 1.

CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

Evaluator's Name:					
Biblical Discipleship Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
Lesson to be Evaluated: 1 to 7					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The material in the curriculum is clearly relevant in the issue of biblical discipleship.					
The material in the curriculum is faithful to a theology that is biblical.					
The material in the curriculum includes relevant information for Christian faith and personal development of a believer.					
The material in the curriculum encourages the principle of multiplication in discipleship.					
The points of the material clearly support the purpose laid out in the project and are easy to understand.					
The material in the curriculum contains points of practical application.					
The material in the curriculum is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of discipleship.					
Overall, the curriculum is clear and could be re-taught by another person.					

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING THE MEMBERS OF GRACE FELLOWSHIP CHURCH IN HAZLETON, PENNSYLVANIA, IN THE PRACTICE OF BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

Dionardo Medina Encarnacion
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Jeffrey W. Hunter

This project sought to equip the members of Grace Fellowship Church in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, in the practice of biblical discipleship. Chapter 1 presents the history and ministry context of Grace Fellowship Church. Chapter 2 provides exegesis of several passages that support discipleship as means for Christlikeness through the practice of spiritual disciplines, obedience to the Word, and making more disciples. Chapter 3 shows how Spirit-dependent biblical discipleship practices have been observed in the examples of many believers in the history of the church, serving as an example to modern-day Christians on how to actively be genuine disciples that replicates and pursuit Christlikeness at all cost. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the content and teaching methodology of the specific course curriculum. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals. Ultimately, those chosen by God grow into Christlikeness by active involvement in discipleship, including active practice of spiritual disciplines, active pursuit of obedience to the Christ's commandments, the fellowship between believers, and intentionally making others disciples.

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